

JUDITH LANKESTER



MARJORIE · HILL · ALLEE

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By Marjorie Hill Allee

LOVELY fifteen-year-old Judith Lankester, petted by her Virginian grandmother, finds herself unwillingly become a part of the stream of migration flowing into Indiana of the 1840's. Judith is placed in the Huff household to earn her living helping with the housework of that pioneer family. The Huff family are born builders. Their great ambition is to build the first railroad in their part of the state. Their plans are threatened by a great flood that sweeps down their valley. The story tells how Judith, at first scornful of them, is able to help them at a crucial moment; and how the Huffs in their turn come to value Judith's gentle ways and beauty. Judith's transition from an ornamental young lady to the capable maker of pound cakes, homespun cloth, and shirts, is set against an authentic background, across which move many other figures typical of that time and place.

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JUDITH LANKESTER



THE TWO TOOK THEIR SEDATE JOURNEY IN ALMOST
COMPLETE SILENCE (*page 183*)

JUDITH LANKESTER

BY
MARJORIE HILL ALLEE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HATTIE LONGSTREET PRICE



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TO
BARBARA
THAT SHE MAY NOT FORGET THE LONG ROAD
HER ANCESTORS TRAVELED

I can imagine my grandmother regarding Judith Lankester with a certain suspicion that the picture might be intended for herself. They are not the same, but they are so much alike that I think they must have been relatives, and I intend to claim Judith for a cousin. And so may you, if you take to each other.

Then, like me, you will meet her not only in these pages, but perhaps looking out of an old daguerreotype, with dark eyes at once haughty and wistful; or you may catch her voice in the quaint phrases of an old recipe for corn pone or pound cake; or she may come to you as you sit dreaming on an old railroad embankment long since deserted, and, with you, dream over the stories of ninety years ago.

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JUDITH LANKESTER



CHAPTER I

EIGHT GRANDDAUGHTERS

THERE were eight girls and five grown people eating noon dinner, but the long table was very quiet. Grandfather Halloway had scarcely said a word since the silent grace, and no one else spoke except when it was necessary, and then in hushed, respectful tones. Grandmother Halloway and young Uncle Jesse saw that all the girls had enough of the plain, abundant food, while Grandfather sat at the head of the table, wrapped in thought.

His fifteen-year-old granddaughter, Judith Lankester, grew impatient. For three whole days now they had been at Grandfather's house. They had been most cordially welcomed; beds had been improvised all over the farmhouse for the eight girls and their mother; and they had been urged to rest after the tedious, rough journey with their covered wagon over the Virginia mountains, down the Kanawha and Ohio rivers, and through the woods to eastern Indiana. But what they were to do next no one ventured to advise or suggest until Grandfather Halloway came home from a business trip to the nearest sizable town, some thirty miles away.

This morning he had come riding in, had greeted them all around, and then had led his horse away to water and pasture in a manner as matter-of-fact as if a visit from his oldest daughter and her family were quite in the usual routine.

Judith had not seen him again until he sat down at the head of the dinner table, a plainly dressed farmer, whose sixty-odd years had stooped his big frame, grizzled the hair combed down over his forehead Quaker-fashion, and left his hands cracked and weather-beaten. Judith stole sideways glances in his direction with increasing disappointment. The only men she had seen with hands like his were the poorer farmers up in the Virginia hills, who could not afford to own even one slave.

All the long journey their mother had talked about Grandfather Holloway, half to her daughters, half to herself. She had not seen him for twenty years and more, not since she had married and gone to Virginia to live, and Grandfather Holloway, fearful that some other child of his might also marry into a slaveholding family, had left Carolina for the newly opened lands of Indiana; but, now that they were to see him again, she recalled an unending number of stories that showed his shrewd wisdom. When the girls tired of the rough muddy road and asked discouraged questions about the new country to which it led, their mother had always one confident answer.

‘Your grandfather will know what to do,’ she said stoutly over and over.

Judith had her own doubts. John Lankester, her handsome, laughing father, had never made decisions for his family. When it must be decided who was to make their new carriage, or how broad the terraces were to be leveled across the steep back yard of their Lynchburg house, he asked his wife or Grandmother Lankester gave him orders. And as for the warehouse on the banks of the James River, his partner was not slow in telling every one after John Lankester’s sudden death that he had always run his half of the business and Mr. Lankester’s too.

If her father, who was obviously so much more a man of the world than Grandfather Halloway, proved of so little use in practical matters, it did not seem likely to Judith that Grandfather’s homely advice was worth waiting for. Her mother might as well make up her mind, as she usually did, what was to become of them, now they had reached Indiana as poor as church mice. Judith herself could think of nothing so delightful and sensible as to return straightway to the comforts of Grandmother Lankester’s Virginian home.

In spite of these thoughts, as soon as Grandfather rose from the table Judith found herself promptly on her feet and waiting in her place as if for orders.

Grandfather paid no attention to her. He said,

‘Well, Charity, come into the other room. We had better talk over thy situation.’ And Judith’s mother followed him into the adjoining parlor and closed the door.

Grandmother Halloway, plump and fresh-faced, still sat at the table. She had taken up a half-finished stocking, and was knitting so briskly that the flying points of the steel needles could hardly be seen. Over her silver-rimmed spectacles she looked down the length of the table at her eight granddaughters, stair-stepped evenly down from twenty-one to five, with an extra long step between nine-year-old Ann and little Polly.

To her young daughter-in-law, Uncle Jesse’s wife, she said, ‘I don’t think thee needs to clear the table to-day. We have plenty of help. Start cutting the carpet-rags, if thee wants to. Take young Charity and Catherine to help. Judith, thee and Phebe can wash the dishes to-day.’

There was a little pause. The other sisters looked curiously at Judith. Judith said politely, ‘I’m not very good at dish-washing, Grandmother. Phebe and Eunice know how.’

Curly-headed Polly, clinging to Judith’s hand, explained importantly, ‘Judith never washes dishes. Her dresses are much too fine. And besides, she lives with our other grandmother, and Grandmother Lankester has slaves to do all that work.’

Grandmother Halloway looked hard at both

Judith and Polly, her knitting needles flashing steadily on; then she glanced at the door that had closed behind their mother, but she did not insist. Phebe and Eunice, like the good girls that they were, carried out the plates, and Martha, next younger, found a dish towel without being asked, while Ann swept up the crumbs.

Judith said, 'Come on, Polly, let's go out to our tree.'

Hand in hand they went out into the late May sunshine, across the uncut blue-grass of the yard to the foot of a wide-branched beech tree. A little store of playthings between two of its high roots showed that they had already spent some time here. Polly took out the bits of broken china and set each on its separate dainty maple leaf, provided by Judith. Her china doll, Melinda, was established in comfort with her back against the tree to stare glassily at her dinner of dandelion-blossom cornbread and sheep-sorrel greens, while Polly herself gazed at Melinda in rapturous admiration.

In the five weeks of their journey Melinda's wardrobe had grown under Judith's skillful hands beyond her most extravagant dreams. While the other sisters had helped with the supper at night, or unpacked the bedding, Judith had made doll clothes for Melinda from her older ribbons and handkerchiefs. She had even cut without a qualm into a riding habit that had not a sign of wear, so that

Melinda might have a suitable blue traveling dress with cloak to match. Polly had loved the long trip, watching Melinda's beautiful costumes grow at night, and through the daytime listening to Judith's stories of Grandmother Lankester's house. She would be ready to start out again at any time.

As she sat contemplating Melinda's billowing skirts and fashionably tight bodice, her little fair head nodded; Judith put an arm gently about her, and Polly, snuggling down beside her beloved sister, was asleep in two minutes. Judith sat as still as the doll, shading Polly's flushed face from the little sun-flecks that sifted down through the beech leaves. Through the open window she heard the steady flow of her mother's and grandfather's voices without distinguishing a word they said.

How poorly the plain substantial frame house before her compared with Grandmother Lankester's red-brick house with its beautiful white doorway, its finely proportioned windows, its setting of box-wood hedges and tall poplar trees! And yet the Halloway house was as large and well planned as most of those that Judith had seen since they left behind them the older settlements in the valley of the Ohio. It was certainly as pretentious as any of the houses she had seen in this neighborhood, even in the little near-by town where they had walked to meeting the day before.

She wondered whether her mother would persuade

Grandfather Halloway to build a house for them. He must have some money. Judith thought she would like a little eight-sided house like that which President Jefferson had built at Poplar Forest, his estate near Lynchburg. Grandmother Lankester considered it a very fine design for a small place.

Nine-year-old Ann came scurrying across the grass to her before she had time to spend any more of Grandfather Halloway's money.

'Grandfather says for us all to come in. Right away!'

'Polly's asleep,' Judith returned, not stirring.

Ann hesitated, on the point of tears. She was a thin, plain little girl, standing in awe of her older sister, whom she did not know very well; but she was even more afraid of not carrying out Grandfather's orders than of incurring Judith's displeasure.

'Grandfather *says* so,' she quavered.

'Well ——' Judith answered reluctantly. 'Take Polly's head while I get up. Be careful! Don't let her bump against that root!'

She lifted the heavy child out of Ann's awkward arms, and carried her expertly indoors, while Ann trailed timidly after.

The others were already assembled in the long parlor. Grandmother sat in her high-backed rocker with her knitting, absorbed in narrowing the ankle of the stocking. Opposite her, Grandfather was

planted in a little straight chair, with his big hands firmly clasping its worn arms. His shoulders were straightened, and for the first time since Judith had seen him he appeared thoroughly interested in what was going on about him. Beside him sat Charity, his daughter, her usually busy hands for once unoccupied; and ranged around the walls in the best stiff walnut chairs were Judith's sisters: young Charity, named for her mother, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother, Catherine, Phebe, Eunice, Martha, and now Ann and Judith, with Polly sleeping on her shoulder.

Grandfather Halloway nodded with satisfaction when they were all seated, but he said nothing at all for a full minute, until Eunice and Ann began to wriggle on their chairs in dreadful anticipation, and even young Charity and Catherine found carpet-rag ravelings that must be flicked from their laps.

He said at last, 'Well, Charity, will thee do the talking?'

'If thee thinks best, Father,' she answered, and addressed herself to the wide-eyed girls.

'I have been telling your Grandfather about our circumstances, children. You older girls understand something about them already. You know that when your father died, freeing his slaves by will at my earnest request, I felt it was the right thing to place them in free territory with a little land to live on or with some other means of support. And I felt,

too, that we ought to leave Virginia so that you would not grow up accustomed to slavery, and perhaps come to regard it as a natural and inevitable system.

‘It was a great expense to provide for these black people. Your father left certain debts to be paid, and the journey here took some of the little money I had left. And I must admit,’ she added, with an apologetic glance at Grandfather Holloway, ‘that I sold the business at a loss. John’s partner knew I wanted the money at once, and he was willing to take advantage of my haste.’

‘I took a loss when I moved up,’ Grandfather Holloway remarked briefly.

She threw a grateful smile at the old man. ‘I knew your grandfather would help us to make arrangements for our living here,’ she went on, ‘and he has done so. He is going to give us the use of the little log cabin down the lane; he says there is a loom already set up there that I may have, and I am going to weave and do what tailoring I can get.

‘He has offered to do more than that, but I do not want my family to be dependent on the bounty of any one, no matter how kindly it is offered.’

‘Is thee sure thee wants to stick to that, Charity?’ interrupted Grandfather. ‘Thee’s had servants and plenty of house room and good clothes and thy own carriage these twenty years now. I didn’t want thee to marry into a slaveholding family, thee

knows that well enough, but that's a long time back. Thee's lived in the ways of the world so long that thee may find it hard to come down to a two-room cabin.'

A red spot grew in either cheek of his daughter.

'Father, I want peace of mind more than anything else in the world now. I would buy it at any cost for myself and the children, and I know that I could never rest content while I lived on the fruits of slave-labor.

'And thee need not think that we are helpless, lazy creatures. There has always been a loom set up in my Lynchburg house and it has seldom been quiet since the older girls grew up. They know how to spin an even thread, flax or wool, and how to cut a pattern and sew a stout seam. There were always poor people in the town who needed clothes and bedding even if we had plenty for ourselves.'

Surprise and admiration crinkled Grandfather Halloway's weather-burnt face. 'Well now, what did Lynchburg think of that? Lynchburg is quite a city for such country goings-on.'

Charity Lankester smiled a little. 'They said it was an amusing employment, I believe; "quaint and old-fashioned for a woman in your position." But I noticed that they used to take pains to send their children around to our house; one mother said she thought her children got into less trouble there than down on the river, playing around the ware-

houses and over the bateaux with the rivermen. I thought so, too,' she observed demurely. 'Her little girl learned to knit as fast as any child I ever taught.'

'Well, well, we'll agree thee knows thy own mind,' admitted her father. 'Go on.'

'I count,' said she, 'that with a garden and chickens and a pig, that I can earn a living by weaving and sewing. Father tells me that there is still a demand for coverlids and blankets and carpets home-woven, in spite of his new woolen mill in town; and he says that a reliable tailoress can always get work. The younger children I can keep with me for a while, but you older ones will have to help. We want to talk about that now.'

'Charity ——' She looked across at her oldest daughter and paused, while young Charity promptly blushed a becoming pink between the two smooth bands of brown hair brushed low over either ear.

'Charity,' said her mother gently, addressing Grandmother Holloway this time, 'Charity has an understanding with a young man back in Virginia. He is a solid young man and I did not discourage their interest in each other; but I told him that I did not think it would be for Charity's happiness to live in a slave state. I told him to think the matter over, and if he was still of the same mind half a year hence to arrange his affairs so that he could follow us and settle in the North.'

'H'm!' remarked Grandfather Holloway not too disapprovingly; but Grandmother's plump face was wreathed in smiles.

'Charity can live right here with us and welcome,' she said. 'Jesse's wife needs a sight more help than I can give her, days when my rheumatism is bad. Charity seems a handy girl and willing; let her stay here!'

'That suit you two?' inquired Grandfather.

Young Charity nodded relieved assent. 'I couldn't ask for a better plan,' said her mother.

Her eyes turned to Catherine, tall and quick and bright-eyed, with none of Charity's round prettiness. 'Catherine's good at her books. She has always made the best of what schooling we could arrange for her, though that was never as thorough nor as regular as I could wish. Is there a chance for her to teach, does thee think, Father?'

Grandfather considered. 'I'll see the Monthly Meetin' school committee. Seems to me they spoke of finding an assistant to Teacher Hiram for this summer session. But they won't pay high wages. Five dollars a month, ten months of the year, is as much as she could expect, and she'll trim pens till she's tired of it!'

Catherine herself spoke up. 'I'd do it for less than that, Grandfather, to get a start!'

'Don't thee tell the committee that,' chuckled Grandfather. 'Tell 'em thee's worth twice as much.'

‘I don’t know that I am,’ returned honest Catherine, ‘but I will be! I can learn while I’m teaching.’

‘So thee can,’ agreed Grandfather. ‘So thee can. We’ll hope thee gets the chance. Now what can Phebe do?’

‘Phebe is a good, careful seamstress,’ her mother answered for her at Phebe’s mute appeal. ‘She recovered my bonnet for me last year, Mother, and thee knows how hard it is to lay the pleats smooth and even round the crown.’

Grandmother Halloway looked at Phebe with real interest. ‘Can she do that? Why, she’s just the one that Sister Sarah has been looking for. Sister makes all the Quaker bunnits for this neighborhood. They come to her from as far as Duck Crick. But she has a lame finger now and she does need help.’

‘Would thee like to be a bunnit-maker?’ Grandfather asked Phebe kindly.

‘If — if I could come home nights to Mother,’ answered timid Phebe.

‘Of course thee could,’ Grandfather assured her. ‘It ain’t a full mile to Sarah’s house. Thee could walk it night and morning.’

‘I’m willing,’ breathed Phebe.

Eunice and Martha and Ann began to sit at strained attention as their turn approached, but Grandfather was now concentrating on Judith.

Judith was quite aware of the fact. She gazed calmly back at Grandfather, wondering of what age his baggy homespun suit might be and whether Grandmother cut his hair. She still held in her arms little Polly, a sleeping, comfortable bundle. By the side of her chair, as Grandfather studied her, appeared a large and handsome gray cat, who stood up with his white forefeet on her knee, evidently hoping to add himself to the warm heap in her lap.

Grandfather said, 'Stand up, Judith. The baby has slept long enough. I ain't had a right good look at thee yet.'

Judith thought to herself that he had had quite as good a look at her as at her sisters, but she did not say so. She laid little Polly in her mother's lap, where the child began slowly to waken, and she stood proudly and serenely in the center of the room before her grandfather.

'Is thee delicate?' inquired Grandfather unexpectedly.

'Judith's as strong as any of the girls,' her mother answered, a little nettled. 'She walked behind the wagon half the way from Virginia and part of the time she even carried Polly.'

'H'm!' commented Grandfather. 'I hear she hasn't been helpin' much with the housework. I thought maybe she had to take care of her health.'

The big gray cat had been making a survey of the room. Now, ignoring all the inviting feminine laps

about him, he walked deliberately across the parlor to Grandfather and in one graceful leap landed on his hard old knees, where he curled down and began to purr.

The little girls, already in a tremble, looked for Grandfather to sweep aside the presumptuous animal in well-justified irritation. To their surprise Grandfather actually seemed pleased by this attention. He tickled the cat gently behind one fringed ear, and when he looked up at Judith again it was with a slightly more friendly air.

Judith's chin was still well up as she waited. Among the others in the room there was a general family resemblance, sometimes greater, sometimes less, but always to be caught. Their good outdoor coloring was neither very light nor very dark; their eyes were blue or blue-gray, and their noses were rather ordinary; even little Polly, who was now a charming blonde child, would soon find her hair darkening to the family medium-brown. People liked the Lankester girls because they were sturdy and pleasant and intelligent; few thought of their appearance.

Judith was evidently like her father's family. Her hair was of a wonderful and curious tawny color, surprisingly dark in the shadows of the braids that encircled her head, surprisingly golden where the sun struck an escaped curl on her cheek. Under dark eyebrows her wide-set eyes were dark

brown; she had a determined nose with a high arch, and a steady, finely curved mouth, now a little too tightly shut.

Even her clothes set her apart from the others. Her sisters' sober-colored dresses were hardly more elaborate than their grandmother's Quaker costume, but Judith, that quiet week day, was dressed in dull blue silk, beautifully made, with very full skirts over crinoline, in the newest fashion of 1841.

A casual observer would have judged that in all that severe room she was the thing most worth seeing, but her grandfather was still as critical of her as he had been kind to her sisters, the girls looked on without sympathy, and her mother seemed to feel there was real cause for worry.

She began to explain anxiously. 'I disagreed with Mother Lankester on so many points that it seemed only fair to let her have Judith's company when she wanted it. She almost brought Judith up.

'And thee knows, Father, how well the Lankesters lived even before Father Lankester died; and after that Mother Lankester kept up still more of an establishment. The estate is eight miles out from town, thee may remember, and there was not much going back and forth. Besides, it wasn't always — agreeable, visiting there, with our differences.

'Judith grew up under that training, with serv-

ants to wait on her hand and foot. Her grandmother dressed and educated her and took great pride in her. Of course thee sees she looks like the Lankesters. But when I was getting ready to come up here I could not feel it was right to leave Judith behind.'

'H'm!'

said Grandfather. 'What did thy Grandmother Lankester say to that, Judith?'

Judith's mind went swiftly back to a day in early April.

'Old Mistis say she want to see Miss Judith out in the garden this minute,' the little black maid said breathlessly. 'She got a letter,' the girl added confidentially.

Judith gathered up her embroidery and went down the steps into the sunken formal garden. At the far end of the straight path sat Grandmother Lankester on the white stone bench; against the dark arborvitæ hedge her face and hair were white; she stared at old Duberry fussing over a flower bed at her feet without seeing him. Duberry was a good gardener, but he was used to having Grandmother Lankester scold him every inch of the way, and in her present unnatural silence he did not know what was expected of him.

When Judith came closer her grandmother turned to face her with anger in her sharp, pale features. Judith had seen her angry many times before, but

always with some one else; that day she seemed to be finding something to blame in Judith herself.

A folded paper crackled in her grasp. She said in a hardly controlled voice, 'I have a letter from your mother. It seems she is not content with freeing your father's slaves and spending his children's inheritance on buying them land and folderols; but now she has made up her mind that it is her duty to take you, too, to the backwoods of Indiana. She knows very well that I would gladly have kept you here with me at my own expense and seen that you were well married when the time came. Oh, why did John ever marry one of these self-righteous Quakers?'

Within Judith there was rising a silent resentment at being thus disputed over by these two women, with no thought for her own preferences.

Grandmother Lankester went on bitterly, 'Your mother's carriage is waiting for my answer; I will tell the driver you are going with him. Get your things together.

'Who knows? You may turn out to be like your mother's people after all. She seemed a soft, harmless young thing when she came up here and took John's eye, but she could always wind him around her finger when he was away from me.'

Judith said proudly, 'Very well, Grandmother.' She turned and sailed gallantly down the path, the wide skirts of her thin muslin dress billowing against

the dwarf-box border on either side. She did not once look back.

But when she reached her own room she sat down in a daze, unable to decide what to do first, until the little maid knocked, to say, 'Old Mistis say, Take ebry t'ing Miss Judith got. Don' want to see 'em any more! Kin I he'p, Miss Judith?'

Then Judith grew angry. She would not even ask Grandmother for a trunk. She fetched a wide cashmere shawl, spread it on the floor, and upon it she piled furiously the many things her grandmother had given her: dresses, wraps, bracelets and little slippers, ribbons and fine embroideries, while the little maid hovered on the edge of the storm of clothes in high excitement.

Judith knotted the opposite corners of the shawl and tugged at them until the whole was a huge compact bundle, and then she remembered her bonnets. These she stacked recklessly, one within the other, careless of their ostrich feathers and flowers. Her high-crowned riding hat refused to fit into the pile at all. 'Here, Sukey, this is for you,' Judith said, and balanced it on the girl's network of pigtails, to Sukey's intense delight.

Now her open wardrobe and her chest of drawers were bare, except for the miniature of her father, painted when he was a small boy. Judith hesitated before this with a trembling lip, feeling childishly that it was not fair to leave her father to endure

Grandmother Lankester's dreaded outbursts of temper, but unable to forget how Grandmother loved the picture, how tenderly she had set it there when she gave it to Judith.

She took her lip between her strong teeth and turned her back on the smiling painted face; slipped into her best satin coat, settled her bonnet hastily, and went down the hall, with Sukey staggering behind her under the awkward bundle of clothes. Grandmother Lankester was nowhere in sight. Her mother's carriage and a sober black driver were waiting before the steps. While Sukey went back for the stack of bonnets old Duberry slipped apologetically up to the carriage window.

'Mistis say you forget this, Miss Judith.' He offered her a knitted purse.

'Tell Grandmother the purse is not mine,' said Judith.

'Money in it,' protested the old man timidly.

'Not my money. Put the bonnets on the seat, Sukey. Good-bye, both of you.'

The heavy carriage moved slowly off. In spite of herself Judith turned to look back as they were about to complete a half-round of the circling drive before the house.

She saw Duberry staring dumfounded from the steps as some small object whirled into the huge round boxwood bush in front of him; and in the doorway little Sukey's face was hid in the crook of

her elbow while Grandmother tore the long feather from the hat Judith had given her.

Grandfather Halloway repeated, 'What did Lydia Lankester say to this move?'

'I'd rather not tell,' said Judith.

'Eh? Didn't she like it?'

'Would thee expect her to like it?' returned Judith. She used the Quaker speech correctly enough, but it lost all its soft familiarity on her tongue. 'She said that my mother had spent her children's inheritance on my father's slaves; and that I might turn out to be like her and her family in the end, and so I had better go with her.'

A little gasp went round the room. Grandmother Halloway's eyes snapped, but Grandfather seemed untroubled.

'She said that, did she? She said that! Well, thee could do worse than to turn out like thy mother.'

He actually chuckled as he tickled the ears of the purring gray cat.

'And so Sister came home. And she brought all her pretty clothes and Sir Thomas Cat,' contributed Polly interestedly.

'Sir Thomas? H'm, so this is thy cat, too. Well, what are we going to do with the cat and thee? What work did thee learn at Lydia Lankester's?'

'I can embroider; I can dance; I've had lessons

in French and in sketching.' Judith related her accomplishments defiantly.

'I don't know of any great demand in this neighborhood for French or dancing,' Grandfather commented dryly. 'What can thee do that's of some use?'

'Nothing!' Judith answered in the same defiant tone. But her mother said, 'Judith is very good with small children, Father. Maybe she doesn't count that as work, because she is so fond of children; but I don't know what we should have done with Polly on this long journey if Judith hadn't taken such care of her.'

'She is good with children.' Grandfather turned this over in his mind. 'Sit down, Judith. I've had a good look at thee. I'll know thee again, never fear!'

He went on, 'Charity, does thee remember Henry Huff? Red-headed Henry Huff? He used to be a neighbor of ours down in Randolph County. A few years older than thee, he was.'

'I remember the Huff red hair, and I remember Henry,' his daughter answered smiling. 'Henry was always making something; he could do almost anything with tools. What became of Henry?'

'He moved up here about the same time I did, and for much the same reason. All his family was born up here. As I recall, his oldest boy is about the age of thy Charity. All the children are boys, and

that's 'most as troublesome as having 'em all girls. They make fine help for Henry on the farm and in his blacksmith shop, but his wife Mary has her hands about full. Their youngest boy ain't as stout either as he ought to be, and that makes it harder for Mary.

'Now I'm goin' to see if Mary Huff won't want thy Judith to help her out. And if we can get Judith settled where she'll be self-supportin', I don't see but what thee can keep the four little girls with thee for a while. I'll pay for their schoolin'. Thee'll let me do that.'

'Father, I couldn't have her bound out! I wouldn't think of that for any of the girls!' Charity Lankester was alarmed.

'Who said anything about bindin' her out? Mary Huff is a good woman; she's a fine woman! She'll take Judith into the family and teach her all that she ought to have learned years before this. What's thee say, Judith?'

Judith's cheeks had lost their faint color, and her manner some of its unbroken composure. 'Is it far away?' she asked.

'Four mile, or thereabouts, north of town and across the river. It's a carriage drive of an hour or an hour and a half, with roads no better than they are.'

'Might I take Polly with me?'

'Little Polly?' Grandfather cast an indulgent

glance at that small girl. 'No, I doubt if Mary could manage with so much extra help right away. I guess if thee takes the cat that will be enough. Has thee got any better scheme, Judith?'

'No,' Judith admitted helplessly.

'Well, then thee had best leave it to us.' He added cheerfully, 'Little David Huff is a right smart little boy, if he *is* sick. I expect you will get on first rate. Dan'l, the oldest boy, is a hard worker and he has a good head; I expect him to do well. Dan'l and I are good friends, but I don't know that he ever has time for girls.'

Young Charity blushed and smiled at this mild joke, but when she glanced at Judith the girl did not seem to have heard it. She continued to stare unseeingly at her interlaced fingers until Grandfather heaved himself stiffly out of his chair, and thus gave the signal for the company to break up.

CHAPTER II

THE ROAD THAT BEGAN IN ENGLAND

GRANDFATHER HALLOWAY'S movements might seem deliberate, but there were some results he could accomplish with little loss of time. In two days he reported that he had Mary Huff's consent to take Judith into her family, and on the afternoon of the third Judith was seated beside him in his stout, shabby old carriage, her belongings neatly stowed away in a little trunk on the back seat, and Sir Thomas Cat jouncing uneasily in her lap, as they took the road north.

Judith had regained her stoical bearing, but Sir Thomas had no intention of concealing his outraged feelings. He had not wished to journey up from Virginia in the first place, but, shut firmly in a basket, he had had no choice. There was no restraining basket now; it had been taken over to hold Charity Lankester's balls of yarn; and Sir Thomas held himself tense in Judith's grasp, waiting for his chance to leap over the wheel and return to the comfortable Halloway kitchen.

The old man, the girl, and the cat jogged silently together down the long single street of the straggling little settlement with its plain weathered houses, its general store, its sawmill, gristmill, and woolen mill.

It was plain that the town would never have grown up here except for the river to run the mills. When they came out into the country the houses left the low ground and took to the hills where field drainage was better, and where, for some unknown reason, there was less fever and ague.

For a long time the road took the easier way along the river bottoms; lanes climbed up from it to the farm buildings and cleared fields on the hills; but where Judith and her grandfather jolted along there was unbroken timber-land on either side. Tall, thick-girthed trees showed many hundred years of growth, and underneath their high branches, wherever the sunshine could strike, a tropical luxuriance of young trees, bushes, and tangling vines pushed out, with a fringe of enterprising weeds shooting up from the rich soil wherever they could force their way.

Judith was too much occupied with her own unhappiness to notice her surroundings, and Grandfather Halloway seemed chiefly intent on evading as many as possible of the deep mud-holes left by the heavy spring rains. His expression suggested that he particularly disliked mud-holes.

‘Thought we were stuck in that one,’ he commented, as the horse braced its legs, gave a mighty jerk, and had them once more on ground that was fairly dry. ‘Somebody ought to bring an axe and chop some beech limbs to lay across that hole.

It ain't surprisin' the Huffs don't come to town often.'

He looked over at his unresponsive companion. 'I guess that cat thinks this is a pretty rough country, hey? How'd thee happen to bring him along?'

'The cat? Sir Thomas? He was mine,' Judith answered coldly.

'Thee seems to go to a good deal of trouble for anything thee *does* like,' Grandfather remarked.

'I heard of a cat back in Philadelphy,' he went on. 'My grandfather told me the tale, so thee can see it was an ancient cat. The pussy came over from England with some folks that came with William Penn to settle Pennsylvania; and I guess the cat was better off than the folks he lived with, for he could scout around for field mice and birds, while their vittles was about gi'n out.'

'This man and his wife was workin' hard one mornin' tryin' to get a chimney built for their first little cabin. Seems like they lived in caves dug in the river-bank till they could get a shelter built. That country was even rougher than this is. Well, the woman she quit work a while before noon to go back to the cave and set out their dinner, and all the time she knew right well they hadn't a thing to eat but a mite of bread and cheese.'

'But what does thee think? Goin' home she met her cat, carryin' its head high, and in its mouth a big fat rabbit. She took that rabbit and she cooked

it for dinner, and she and her husband were so glad to get it that they cried for thankfulness.

‘Does thee think thy Thomas cat could do that well?’

‘He never had to,’ Judith said with faint scorn. She did not wish to be entertained like a small child with Grandfather’s stories.

Grandfather carefully arranged both driving-lines in one square fist. ‘Come here, pussy,’ he said, lifting Sir Thomas over to his homespun knee. ‘Maybe thee’ll feel a little more solid here.’ And in the crook of his elbow Sir Thomas consented to remain, watchful-eyed, but quiet.

‘Years later, when she was wealthy, that Philadelphy woman had a silver tureen made and in the silver she had a picture cut, of the cat with the rabbit in its mouth,’ said Grandfather casually. ‘She set store by it. I expect that family liked to remember the times when they were poor. Folks do.’

Judith made no reply.

Grandfather persevered gently. ‘Did thee find the trip hard? Sleepin’ by a campfire where there ain’t lodgin’s to be had; walkin’ in the rain, maybe; and climbin’ up one steep mountain to find another higher one in front across the next valley? It ain’t easy for women and children, though it’s better than twenty years ago when I come on.’

‘I didn’t mind the roads. We have some rough

roads in Virginia. And the mountains were beautiful. But not to get anywhere in the end!' Judith burst out, against her will.

'Thee feels this ain't any place?' Grandfather surveyed the substantial gleaming sycamore trunks on either side; he even cocked an eye up at the warm blue sky. 'Well, maybe I know what thee means. To thee it don't seem like a place to stay and live?'

'No!' said Judith, and pressed her lips together tight to keep them steady.

'I can see that it might seem different to thee, brought up as thee was, from what it would to some others,' Grandfather said reasonably.

'I don't understand,' Judith said with a catch in her voice. 'Why did you all want to come up here? Mother says you were comfortable enough where you were.'

'Ain't thee heard that story?' asked Grandfather slowly. 'Well, maybe not. Or only bits of it here and there. Folks kind of expect children to know family history without bein' told.

'I'll make it as clear to thee as I can.

'When thy mother was a young woman at home in North Car'lina, she got an invitation to come spend a month or two with my brother Sam'l and his wife up in Virginia, at Lynchburg. I guess thee never knew Sam'l, but most likely thee's heard tell of him. Sam'l was well fixed and he had no children of his own; I thought Charity would enjoy the visit

and seein' the town. She was the oldest of our children and she had always worked hard helpin' Mother with the younger children. We felt it would be right for her to have a pleasure trip.

'And so she went, real pleased to go, with some friends that were goin' that far north. I can see her now, ridin' off,' said Grandfather thoughtfully. 'She looked real nice.

'She never was at home again.

'Next thing we knew, John Lankester of Lynchburg wanted to marry her. I expect thee knows thy Grandfather Lankester come of a Quaker family, but they turned against Friends when they were asked to give up their slaves. Still they sometimes saw our folks, and that was how John met our Charity.

'I never held anything against John, except that he hadn't got enough spunk to stand out against his mother. He would have been willing to free the slaves he had inherited, if Lydia Lankester would have let him, but not Lydia! Charity married him anyhow, against my advice.

'She kept him as clear as she could. John arranged for his mother to take the estate and most of the slaves for her part, and John took the warehouse and some money. What slaves he still held he hired out for the most part; I guess he didn't feel so responsible for them then. He meant well, John did; he was a pleasant man.

‘I don’t know that he ever really understood the way Quakers feel about slavery. We sense something precious in every human bein’, even the blackest and the meanest; and so we can’t bear to feel that any man, woman, or child is bein’ held against his own will and his own good. It injures the slave and drags down the master that holds him.’

Judith stared.

‘Thee can’t understand either? Well, remember what I say. Thee may recall it some day and know what I mean.

‘Friends in the South had cleared themselves of slavery a good many years ago. It was hard work gettin’ state laws that would let us free them, both in Car’lina and Virginia; and after they were freed they were never safe so long as they were in slave territory. We had to scrape up money to settle them away from there, sometimes in the free Northern states, sometimes in Hayti or over in Liberia; and we did it.

‘But I could see when Charity married a slaveholder that we were no safer than the slaves. We should have to take our children away or they would be gettin’ tangled up in the system again, just like Charity was.

‘Now that decision to move on wa’n’t so surprisin’ as thee might think. We Quakers have been movin’ around for near two hundred years.

‘The first Quaker Halloway, he went to prison for conscience sake first under Oliver Cromwell, and at the end of the reign of Charles the Second he was still bein’ thrown into prison regular for attendin’ Friends meetin’ or wearin’ his hat in court or the like. Seems like he had been in prison one time and another all over England, and English prisons wa’n’t no joke in that day. Cold and wet and filthy, and under jailers chosen for their cruelty! But still, knowin’ what was before him, he would set to preachin’ again as soon as he was released, and keep on preachin’ till he was taken up on a charge of disturbin’ the peace. A breach of the peace, or a riot, that was what they called a Quaker meetin’ in them days!

‘Well, James the Second followed Charles, and Friends got up a petition to him, recitin’ their sufferin’s. At that time there was more than fourteen hundred of them in English prisons. James was a Catholic and he knew what it was to be persecuted. He pardoned them all.

‘This first Halloway was an old man by that time, in poor health, and he and his son thought it might be best to move out to William Penn’s colony in the New World, where Friends had been settled in peace for a few years and were already prosperous.

‘He came over with most of his family. They settled for a while in Pennsylvania, but they hadn’t much money left by this time; their children had to

scatter out on cheaper land. Some of them went down into Virginia; but my grandfather went on down into central North Carolina where there was already a few Quakers. There my father was born and there I was born.

‘And, as thee says, we were comfortable. We had our farms and we built up our meetin’s and our schools, but we weren’t ready to stop yet. Friends had been movin’ on over Dan’l Boone’s wilderness trail, or up the Kanawha, for forty years before I made up my mind we should have to follow. Most of them had stopped in Ohio, but when Charity was married Indiana lands were open for sale, with a promise that there would never be slavery in the state. So I sold my farm and my mill and we came.

‘And I like it now,’ he added, addressing Judith’s unresponsiveness a little wistfully. ‘It’s fine corn land, and real pretty country. I like it. It seems like home.

‘Thy mother,’ he went on patiently as he received no answer, ‘thy mother felt more and more as I did about slavery as the years went on. Thee knows that she got thy father to make a will freein’ his slaves in case of his death. Lydia Lankester never heard of that will until her son died, and it was a blow to her. Maybe thee hadn’t heard that she proposed to thy mother that they should keep it secret, so that no one could compel its carryin’ out.

‘But thee does know what thy mother did. After

thy father's debts were paid, and they were numerous, she took the money that was left and spent most of it buyin' little farms in free territory and settlin' the black people on them — all but two that were so old they didn't want to leave Virginia; and she arranged with the county court for them to stay on, so long as they behaved themselves. She promised to stand responsible for them.'

'Yes,' Judith returned vigorously, 'and when Uncle Mose eats up all the hominy grits and bacon Mother left for him and Aunt Tildy, he'll go out begging and Aunt Tildy will pretend to be dying, and everybody will blame us. He's a no-'count nigger. Grandmother says he ought to have been sold years ago!'

Grandfather sighed more deeply. 'Well, I have seen spoiled white folks, too. We have to get along with them somehow.'

Judith was not listening. A side road turned just then toward the descent to the river ford; the road they had traveled had been climbing for the last quarter of a mile, until it was well above the river level. Beyond them and below, by the roadside thicket, rose a great tree, magnificently tall and straight, its every glossy-leaved branch tipped with a blossom that was like a spring flame, pale-green, orange, and cream-colored.

Judith drew in a long, difficult breath. 'The tulip-tree!' she whispered. 'The tulip-tree is in

bloom! They are blooming just like that back at Grandmother's!

'What's that?' inquired Grandfather. 'Oh, the poplar's in bloom? That's one thing we have here as well as back in old Virginia. I expect thee'll find other things as well. Thee may decide this ain't such a foreign country as thee supposed.

'Now what's this goin' on here? Whoa!'

He checked the horse where the road entered the river and peered out at a little structure on the river bank near them. Some one had cut small logs to about an eight-foot length, notched them near either end so they would fit over one another, and built of them a triangular pen about as high as a man's shoulder, with the apex of the triangle pointing upstream, and this pen had been half-filled with boulders.

The muddy little river before them was wider than usual at this point; in mid-current it was building up a sand-bar that already boasted a small willow-bush and some young weeds. On this island stood another of the triangular pens, larger, higher, and built of thicker logs; and on the opposite bank, in line with the other two, appeared a third pen like the first.

'Dan'l's work,' Grandfather guessed. 'What's Dan'l up to now, I wonder? There, I forgot my drink at the spring. There's a fine spring a few steps back up the hill; they keep it cleared out and

hang a gourd there. When they work on their land this side the river they fill their jugs at the spring. It's good water. Thee want some?'

Judith did not. She took back the unwilling Sir Thomas, and held the lines until Grandfather returned, evidently much pleased.

'They've sunk a gum in the spring since I was along,' he announced. 'The overflow runs off in a trough, so there ain't always a loblolly of mud around the spring. I do like to come by once in a while and see what new thing the Huffs have done.'

'A gum?' Judith questioned uncertainly.

'Yes, a gum,' Grandfather repeated. 'Don't thee know what that is? It's a sawed-off section of a hol-ler tree. Saves carpenter work to have the round ready-made like that. I've noticed Henry Huff has him some gums fitted with bottoms like barrel-heads, and he sets them in the barn to hold grain. And back here, somebody has sunk a gum in the spring to make it like a shaller well. Gitup!'

The horse moved reluctantly into the water, while Grandfather Halloway guided him with precision, his eye on a stone at the far edge of the stream.

'When thee fords this,' he advised, 'be careful not to bear too far upstream. Over there is a deep hole that might be hard to pull out of. And don't thee cross at all if the water is above yon stone. It ain't safe. This ain't a big stream, but it's tricky.'

Beyond the fringe of trees along the river-bank a broad stretch of river-bottom-land came to view as the dripping carriage rolled up from the water. To the north of the road these lowlands were still wooded, as was the shelf of the higher 'second bottoms' outlined along the steep bluffs that marked the western boundary of the valley, but to their left was a cleared field, newly cut from the forest.

'Dan'l's got his field planted,' Grandfather announced with satisfaction. 'Must be ten acres there, and the corn's comin' up good. Ve-ry good!'

He sighted down the straight rows, interrupted here and there by broad tree-stumps, and catching sight of a tall figure, vigorously hoeing, he halted the carriage.

'Dan'l! Hey, Dan'l!' he called.

The young man turned, straightened his shoulders from the hoeing stoop, appeared to recognize the horse and carriage, and came down the row toward them.

'How's thee and thine, Dan'l?' Grandfather queried affably, not waiting for an answer. 'This is our Judith, that's coming to live at your house. Judith, this is Dan'l Huff. Thee ain't afraid of a flood over that corn, Dan'l? I've seen the river out over the bottoms later than this.'

'How is thee?' Daniel said, without the least interest in the girl. It seemed doubtful if he really

saw her, for his attention was directed toward Grandfather, man to man.

Judith did not attempt to return the salutation. She saw a tall young man dressed in faded jeans, whose big frame was over-thin from the spring work. Bare-headed, he was at once conspicuous for his splendid crest of rebellious fiery red hair. Judith thought he might be aware of this, for after he had wiped his hot forehead he jammed his old hat firmly in place again. Between his eyebrows was a faint anxious wrinkle as he talked over with Grandfather Holloway the possibilities of disaster to his crop.

He was saying, 'Father and I count that the river floods enough to do real damage about one year out of three. I have to take my chance of that. If I do get a crop there will be twice as many bushels to the acre as on Father's uplands. This is fine soil.'

He scooped up a handful of the sandy loam and let it trickle through his fingers, while Judith, hating the touch of dirt, puckered her face in disgust.

Neither of the two experts noticed her. Grandfather said, 'Thee's young enough to take a few chances, Dan'l. And I will say thy corn has a good start. What's thee doin' with thy pens down at the river?'

Daniel smiled as if he were used to being teased on this point, and the fine wrinkle disappeared.

'That's my footbridge,' he stated hardily.

‘So?’ inquired Grandfather. ‘How does thee work it? Is thee goin’ to set on them monyments to rest thyself when thee wades the river? Or maybe thee means to use stilts between stations?’

Daniel was not at all abashed. ‘When I get the pens filled with more stone for ballast then I’m going to lay a couple of logs from one to the other. I saved out some good timber when I cleared the last of this field this winter. I hate to see all that wood burnt up out in the log piles!’

‘When we have a bridge we won’t always have to wade or take a horse when we do a little work across the river. Some day I mean to build a bridge for wagons, too!’

‘H’m,’ commented Grandfather, not too favorably. ‘Don’t thee take on too much. Some day thee’ll learn thee can’t move the world.’

‘Oh, I only work of nights and odd times on that footbridge,’ the young man explained hastily. ‘I expect to keep my own corn clear of weeds and help Father with his.’

‘What about Dennis O’Brien?’ asked Grandfather. ‘Can’t he take thy place? Thee’s twenty-one, ain’t thee, and on thy own time?’

‘Oh, Denny ——’ The wrinkle of worry showed again. ‘Denny has his mind on the great things he’s going to do when he gets plenty of money and a good chance. He can’t seem to get interested in any of the jobs we offer him. He makes me mad

sometimes,' Daniel confessed with a smile. 'When we need help the worst he is sure to talk the most and work the least. But the way he grew up, maybe he can't help it.'

'I guess thy folks would be as patient with him as any,' said Grandfather. 'Well, we must be gettin' on. Thy mother is about the house?'

'Mother's there,' said Daniel. 'Farewell.' He resumed his long, level hoeing stroke.

'Gitup!' Grandfather commanded, slapping the lines on the horse's back. 'I don't know as I thought to tell thee about this Dennis O'Brien, Judith.'

'There was a poor family come drivin' in here a couple of years ago — folks said they were wild Irish from the hills. The father and mother was both sick and though they got good care they died very soon, leavin' this boy. Mary Huff took him in to raise with her own, and I don't know but what she got more than a handful in Dennis. I understand they never have got him under discipline. He's nearly as old as Dan'l, but not much good to work; and sometimes he runs away and stays three-four days, and they don't know where he is.'

'Most likely thee won't need to see much of him. Chaffy! That's what I call him. Chaffy!'

The carriage was climbing the steep bluff at the western edge of the river lowlands. Grandfather looked down the road, noticing the harsher noise of the steel tires on this slope.

‘They’ve been workin’ the road. Looks to me they’ve put gravel all along here. That ain’t a bad idea. And they’ve shaped it up to drain off in a ditch either side. I wish more folks would work their roads reg’lar.’

At the top of the long hill he turned into a gravelled driveway and drove up beside a house that turned its back square on the public road, in order that it might face the south.

‘Well, Judith, thee may get out,’ he said. ‘This is the place where thee’s to live.’

CHAPTER III

THE WEAVING-CABIN

‘I’d put the cat down if I was in thy place,’ advised Grandfather, as Judith stood, uncertain, beside the carriage. ‘He might as well get used to it one time as another.’

He addressed himself to lifting out her trunk, while Judith looked around the irregular grassy quadrangle enclosed on three sides by stout homely farm buildings. The house was a rambling structure that had begun as a story-and-a-half log cabin, and had since added to itself a two-story frame building on the nearer end and a long low shed on the other. Both of these newer additions ran forward beyond the log cabin so as to furnish a solid wall on either side of a deep porch across the front of the cabin, and this set-in porch, like a room with one side thrown open, had white-washed walls and was furnished with homemade benches and a chair or two.

Across a stretch of uncut blue-grass a good-sized barn faced the house, and between the two, almost connecting them, was a row of sheds, all looking much alike to Judith, though one was for wagon and carriage shelter, with room for carpenter tools and lumber, one was a blacksmith shop, well equipped, and one housed the chickens.



JUDITH LOOKED AROUND THE IRREGULAR GRASSY
QUADRANGLE

Grandfather Halloway saw comfort and cleanliness here; he saw buildings made by hard effort from lumber grown on the farm itself, and kept in good repair and under tight roofs. For Judith these were only weather-gray shelters, lacking all grace of construction. She had not imagined how fiercely she could long to struggle out of this bad dream and find herself again before the beautiful white doorway of the Lankester house.

At this bitter moment there arose a timely diversion. Sir Thomas, advancing distrustfully, met a curious creature quite outside the range of his experience. Sir Thomas was a selfish cat; he had never made friends with any one less important than the few people of whom he approved; but he had met other cats and several dogs, and he knew what to do on these social occasions. He could leap and scratch with the deadly swiftness of lightning, leaving a bewildered and indignant, but thoroughly cowed animal to yelp or meow for assistance; or he could, if it seemed wisest, turn his back and stalk away to a safe hiding-place, switching his tail with such a dangerous air that he could make good his retreat before the other decided to investigate his behavior.

This new animal, coming softly and confidently to meet him, looked much like a long-nosed yellow-gray cat smudged with soot about the eyes, but it did not smell at all like a decent cat. Sir Thomas

paused; he sniffed delicately and the fur rose along his back, and then as it came on he flattened himself down into the grass. The tight homemade leather collar around the animal's neck, and the restraining chain that dangled from it and led to a staple firmly driven into a near-by tree, meant nothing to Sir Thomas. He made one leap for the tree to which the chain was fastened, and clawed his way up its generous trunk with energy surprising in so large and lazy a cat.

Neither would he come down. The raccoon watched with intelligent interest while Grandfather Holloway and Judith tried to coax Sir Thomas to earth again, but the cat crouched uneasily in the crotch of a large limb and refused to move.

'Well, leave him be,' said Grandfather. 'He'll have to learn sense for himself. Here is Mary Huff. Mary, this is Judith Lankester. Thy 'coon has treed her cat.'

'It's not my 'coon,' Mary Huff said pleasantly. 'I can't be responsible for everything my tribe of boys brings in. That 'coon belongs to the twins. Dennis carried it home to them from a night's hunting, and Joseph John made the collar and chain. This was the first chain he ever made, and I think he did well, though the boys make fun of it. When they come in from the field I'll ask the twins to climb the tree for the cat; I don't suppose he'll come down of himself.'

‘Well, Judith, how is thee? We shall be glad to have a girl about our house.’ Her greeting was cordial as it was brisk, but there was a wrinkle of worry between her eyes as she laid a work-roughened hand gently on Judith’s embroidered muslin sleeve. ‘Thee’d better come in and change thy pretty dress before thee gets it spoiled out here in the country.’

‘This is the oldest morning dress I have,’ Judith explained stiffly.

‘The truth is, Mary,’ said Grandfather, ‘that Judith ain’t got much that’s suitable to wear, though she has plenty of clothes. Lydia Lankester provided her well with frills and furbelows, but her mother says she ain’t got a thing fit for farm work. Still, Charity thought she had better wear out what she has, on account of the expense of new things.’

‘She can’t take much satisfaction trying to cook or wash in a dress like that,’ Mary Huff said decidedly. She was evidently comparing her own scant short dress of natural-colored linen, adorned only with a white Quaker neckerchief, to Judith’s long full sleeves and billowing skirts. ‘To-morrow I’ll see if I have a dress that can be fitted to her. We’re much the same height. I can just take in a few darts around the waist.’

She turned to Grandfather. ‘Joseph Halloway, will thee take Judith’s trunk around to the weaving-room? The house is full of men and boys, espe-

cially since we hired a new hand yesterday; and I thought it would be quieter and more private for Judith if she slept in the loft of the weaving-room.'

'As thee says. Just as thee says.' Grandfather shouldered the trunk and went off along the back of the house, Judith following. Attached to the back of the long shed and within a few feet of the main house was another small log cabin, complete in itself, with its own fireplace chimney and a broad flat stone for a doorstep. The space between this cabin and the house had been paved with cobblestones, around which the green grass was pushing up. Beside the doorstep a young trumpet-vine was freshly planted.

Grandfather lifted the latch, stepped in and eased his burden to the floor; Judith came after, struck with the heat of the room.

'Shut the door, Car'linian!' said a rude little voice from the fireplace corner.

Judith wheeled, startled. She had made out first that a great awkward loom and its weaver's bench occupied more than a quarter of the floor space of the little cabin. Now she saw that opposite her, close by the fireplace where even on this warm day wood smouldered on the andirons, stood a narrow bed on which lay a thin little boy, well covered with blankets.

'Shut the door, Car'linian!' he repeated, his voice rising. 'I'll catch cold and then I'll be sicker.'

'I warn thee, David,' said Grandfather good-naturedly, 'that there may be trouble if thee calls Judith Car'linian. She's Virginian, and the Virginians are right particular not to be called out of their own names.'

'She'd better not behave like one then,' threatened David.

'What does he mean — behaving like a Car'linian?' Judith asked, diverted.

'Does thee know, thyself, David? My guess is that he don't. He's heard people say that when a door was left open. I'll tell thee. Back in old Car'lina there's plenty of people that can't afford to spend money on glass for good windows like thee has here, David. They have a front door and maybe a back door in their little cabins, and for light and air they have to leave the doors open. So it's got to be a joke with us, that if a person leaves a door open he must have got used to that back in Car'lina.

'How do these windows of thine work, David? I see, they slide back, don't they? Like this. That's clever, ain't it?'

The stuffy room welcomed gratefully the entering fresh air.

'Father says he is going to make hinges for the windows when he has time,' boasted David. 'Father has done so much horseshoeing for the neighbors this spring he is behind with his own black-

smithing. But I can't have the windows open,' he remembered in alarm, coughing a practiced cough.

Grandfather said, 'Thy mother told us Judith was to sleep up in the loft. Where does thee keep the ladder, David? I'll take up her trunk before I go.'

'The ladder is along the wall beside the loom,' David pointed impatiently. 'What has she got in her trunk?' He had forgotten the dreaded fresh air. 'I want to see what she has in her trunk!'

'Well, now, thee'd better speak to her about that.' Grandfather skillfully adjusted the substantial ladder so that the top rested within a square opening in the ceiling.

'I want to see what she has in her trunk!' The little boy was sitting up in his tumbled cot, ready to cry. 'I never see anything!'

'I'll show thee what I brought,' Judith assured him warmly. 'But it's mostly dresses. Does thee like dresses?' She leaned over to plump up his pillow and straighten the wrinkles from his coarse blanket.

David pulled back distrustfully. 'Of course I don't like dresses. Boys don't like dresses. But I want to see something new whether I like it or not.'

'Will thee leave the trunk here, Grandfather? Tell Mrs. Huff, please, that I will stay with David for a while.'

Grandfather looked her over. 'That might be a

good order to follow,' he remarked mildly. 'But if I was thee, Judith, I'd call Mary Huff Aunt Mary. She'll like it better.'

'Well —' said Judith. 'And Grandfather! please tell Polly I'll be sure to sit with her in meeting next Sunday — I mean First Day!'

Grandfather's old face was compassionate. He said, 'I supposed thee knew the Huffs go to the meetin' out here in the country. Pleasant Heights, they call it. It's a big meetin' and older than ours in town.'

'But there'll be some passin' and thee'll see thy little sister and the other girls and thy mother as much as there's time for visitin'. Summer's a busy time.'

He went on slowly, 'Judith, don't thee hold this change in thy circumstances against thy mother. She is tryin' to do what is right, and I can tell thee that ain't always easy. Maybe some day thee will thank her for puttin' thee in a more independent way of life. Do thy best here. I wouldn't wonder but what thee come to be right happy.'

'I will do my best,' said Judith concisely, 'and it doesn't seem to matter whether I am happy or not. Good-bye, Grandfather.'

She turned back to David, balancing perilously on the edge of his bed, trying to unbuckle the trunk straps. For an hour they looked over the contents of the trunk, and David could hardly have been

more interested in the costumes of the queen of Spain. He criticized their colors, giggled over the stiff crinoline, and scorned the low, flat-heeled slippers; but he ran his sensitive fingers delicately along the silk folds, and Judith's fur-trimmed, wadded satin cloak he lifted involuntarily to his thin cheek.

Judith said, 'Wouldn't thee like to spread that over thy bed for a summer cover? It isn't so heavy as a blanket, but it's warm.'

David looked up suspiciously. Then, 'Could I?' he asked, and gathered the soft cloak into his arms and lay back holding it close. When Judith turned from laying her dresses back in the trunk, the little boy had fallen asleep, his face against the fur.

Mary Huff, appearing at the door, looked in amazement at David sleeping under the luxurious cloak and still more oddly at the open windows. She opened her mouth, but thought better of speaking and beckoned Judith to come with her.

'I'm real glad to see David asleep,' she said, once within the low-ceilinged kitchen that took up all the first floor of the log house. 'He seldom sleeps well of nights. Henry thinks he has the weaving-room too warm for comfort, but David won't have it otherwise. Did he make much fuss about opening the windows?'

'No,' said Judith.

'Daniel has been staying with him of nights, and



FOR AN HOUR THEY LOOKED OVER THE CONTENTS OF THE
TRUNK

David wouldn't let him open the window a single crack.

'It's near supper-time, and I wanted help to get supper on the table and David's plate out to him, though there is precious little he will be coaxed to eat, since he was sick. Maybe he will sleep till after supper if we ask the boys to be quiet. That would be best.'

Judith was unbelievably awkward at the unaccustomed tasks. Under direction she set the long table that stood across one end of the kitchen with thick plates and handleless cups of a coarse luster ware. She laid a bone-handled steel knife and fork and one thin pointed silver spoon at each of the ten places. Then she tried to help take up the food that had been cooking on the tidy hearth before the fire and in the iron kettle swung from a crane, but chiefly succeeded in burning her fingers and collecting a seasoning of ashes.

Mary Huff said, 'Let me do that.' And Judith stood aside, humiliated, hot, and unhappy. By some deft sleight-of-hand that she was too inexperienced to understand the meal was on the table by the time a troop of men and boys filled the room.

Henry Huff took pains to come over to her and give her a crushing grip of his huge hand. 'So thee's Charity Hallowsay's girl. I'm glad thee's come.' Daniel gravely looked straight over her head and the younger boys disregarded her also,

except for sundry unexplained snickers and squeakings from the eleven-year-old twins. Judith attempted, with fair success, to appear unconcerned, even when she found herself seated at table between these same twins.

After grace she looked around her. The level rays of the low sun had stolen momentarily across the porch into the room. It could still light a faint fire in Henry Huff's thick graying hair, but it blazed triumphantly as it touched the heads of his three oldest sons across the table from Judith; first Daniel, then Joseph John and Mark, who might have been seventeen and fifteen each. They ate hastily, their shy blue eyes fixed on their plates, and if they spoke it was under their breath.

There could hardly have been a greater contrast to the three than the young man at the end of the row, next to Mary Huff. He might well be of age, like Daniel, but he was not even so tall as raw-boned Mark. He was noticeable now, not so much for his dapper smallness or for his straight black hair, parted low over the left ear and combed sleekly back, as for the evident pleasure it would have given him to attract Judith's attention. His airs grew with her disregard. The Huff family passed the platter of ham and the plate of corn-bread around the table with great regularity, but the black-haired young man was not content with this.

He leaned forward to say, 'The young lady isn't eatin', now. Is there somethin' she might fancy that I could get? A cold drink of water fresh from the spring?'

The twin to Judith's left spoke up indignantly. 'I carried this water from the spring myself, so I did, Denny! It's good an' cold!'

The other twin added, 'My water's all gone, Denny. I don't mind if thee gets some colder for me. Or some milk. I guess I'd rather have milk.'

Mark and Joseph John grinned, but Denny disregarded them. He soared to greater heights of solicitude.

'It can be seen the young lady isn't used to the rough food of farmers. Beggin' your pardon, Mistress Huff, for 'tis fine and well-cooked food, such as it is! But a jar of your preserves, might she not find them more temptin'?''

'I've noticed thee finds them so,' Mary Huff answered quietly. 'Judith will ask for what she wants.'

'I don't want anything,' Judith protested hastily. 'I'm not hungry.'

It was quite true. Her appetite had been effectively undercut by the knowledge that, only one seat removed from her, eating at the same table, was a bent and shrinking old negro.

If she had looked back at him after her first glance had struck his black face and grizzled wool,

she would have seen that he was as ill at ease to be eating with white people as the girl was to have him at the table. When he had first come, he had indeed protested his unworthiness, but to no effect; since then he had made himself as clean as possible, had kept silence, and was humbly grateful not to be put off with left-over scraps of food.

Judith was too intelligent to feel that the matter was one that could be argued with this Quaker household; indeed she could hardly explain it to herself. She only knew that for a negro to share her food somehow brought her down to the level of kitchen maids and field hands. And there was nothing she could do about it. The Huffs were acting on a principle.

If she had known the right-hand twin longer she would have been suspicious of the quiet that had held him for some minutes while Judith pretended to eat the food on her plate.

He began unexpectedly, in a high singsong, 'Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions and the garlic; but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes, Numbers Eleven, four to six.'

He devoted himself again to his supper in all innocence, while the left-hand twin peeped up hopefully at Judith.

Mary Huff said, 'Thomas Ellwood, I would not have thought that thee knew the Scriptures so well. To-night thee may learn a verse from the New Testament to go with that, and in the morning thee may repeat it at the table, too. Matthew, seventh chapter, twelfth verse.'

Presently, red to his ears under his fine crop of freckles, Thomas Ellwood said, 'Aw, I know that one already.'

'Does thee? Then thee may repeat it now, and I hope thee will act on it hereafter,' his mother said relentlessly.

'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets,' responded Thomas Ellwood in two breaths.

Under his appealing glance his mother graciously changed the subject. 'There, I'd nearly forgotten. Judith, why didn't thee remind us that thy cat is up the big maple? The 'coon frightened him, Thomas Ellwood. Thee must climb the tree after supper and bring him down. I hope he is a good mouser. We need one.'

'I'll help,' offered the other twin.

'That's right, Robert Barclay. Yes, you two may go now, if you've finished.'

Their excited departure served as a signal for the older people to leave the table. Mary Huff said, 'I think I'll ask thee to do the dishes, while I set

sponge, Judith. Or can thee make bread, thyself?’

‘No,’ said Judith. ‘I can’t do anything about the house well. I can’t even wash dishes.’

The other looked pained. ‘Don’t make light of thy abilities. Anybody can wash dishes! There’s the pan, and thee sees the hot water in the kettle. As I go to the spring-house for the yeast I’ll ask one of the twins to fetch thee more water to fill up the kettle.’

She bustled out, leaving Judith to collect the plates awkwardly together. Thomas Ellwood appeared presently, slopping the spring water unconcernedly over the sides of his wooden bucket.

‘Mother says I’ve got to wipe dishes,’ he announced. ‘Say, that’s a big cat! He got clear away from me after I had him halfway down the tree. He jumped over Rob’s head, and now he’s hiding under the wood-house. Rob has been trying to get him out, but he can’t, even with a ham bone.’

‘What’s thee looking for? There’s the soap.’ He splashed a great chunk of gray, homemade soap into the dishpan, and tested the water with a practiced finger. ‘That’s too hot. Here, I’ll put in a dipperful of cold water. I’m glad thee’s come here to wash dishes. Rob and me has had to do it nearly every night.’

Judith pushed up her full sleeves and began to wash distastefully with the tips of her fingers while Thomas Ellwood wiped and advised. He could

wipe much faster than Judith washed, so that he had ample time to observe and correct her performance.

‘Thee’s got plenty of soap now. When the dishes get too soapy they’re slippery. I guess thee don’t know much about dishwashing.’

‘I like plenty of soap,’ said Judith, not to be dictated to. She lifted one of the handleless cups gingerly from the suds, and to her dismay it slipped in her fingers. She attempted to catch it with the other hand, and for a moment the cup and the dishcloth figured in a desperate juggling performance that ended with the cup on the kitchen floor in two pieces.

‘It was not fine china, anyway,’ Judith said defensively. But Thomas Ellwood gave her an indignant glare.

‘That is Mother’s wedding china,’ he reproved her. ‘Mother! Judith broke a cup of thy best china!’

‘Oh!’ Mary Huff exclaimed in real concern. ‘It was a mistake to get it down, wasn’t it? But I wanted the table pretty for Judith’s first meal. Give me the pieces; I’ll put them away and maybe Father can suggest some way to mend the cup.’

She must have seen Judith’s look of helpless distress.

‘Don’t thee mind,’ she said generously, stowing the pieces of broken china in the back of a corner

cupboard. 'I know thee's tired and upset. Thomas Ellwood, take that yeast and put warm water with it, and when thee's saved out some for the next bread, take it out to the flour chest and stir in enough flour to thicken it. Thee knows about how it ought to be. I'll finish washing the dishes and Judith may wipe.'

Judith took over the dish towel obediently, and Thomas Ellwood made off into the shed with the crock of warm yeast-water, apparently, to Judith's surprise and envy, as expert in the setting of bread-sponge as at dishwashing. He came back presently, liberally whitened with flour, set the crock down at the edge of the warm hearth, and covered it with a lid and a clean towel.

'What's the matter with Davy?' he demanded. 'I peeked in there, and he was sound asleep.'

'Don't thee disturb him,' his mother admonished. 'Nothing is the matter with him. I hope he will go on sleeping all night. He must have had a real good time with thee this afternoon, Judith,' she said gratefully. 'Joseph Halloway said thee had a way with children. Is thee willing to have him on thy mind to-night, sleeping out there?'

'Yes,' said Judith.

'Then why don't thee go to bed early thyself? Thee'll feel better by morning. That will do now.'

Judith understood that she was dismissed. She thought of Sir Thomas, but she was in no mood to

match wits with the self-willed cat. She went softly across the cobblestones to the little cabin that was hers and David's. It was now too dark to see distinctly inside it; but she felt in her trunk for the things she would need and climbed the ladder-rungs to the low loft.

Only directly under the roof-tree was there sufficient room for her to stand upright; to reach her little bed she had to stoop. When she had opened the window on either side the chimney she hesitated a moment and then she went back to the ladder and descended it. Her eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness; she could loosen David's grasp of the satin cloak in which he had muffled himself, and, without wakening him, straighten his flannel gown and lay the cloak smoothly across his hot little body. Then she climbed back to her bed and lay quietly in the warm summer darkness while the tears dripped into her pillow.

At first there were the noises of the men coming up from the work of the barn; and then the sound of two pairs of feet tramping off down the graveled highway. After that there was nothing but the rasping of the insects in the trees, and the faint foot-falls and snuffling of the animals in the barn lot. Presently Judith, in spite of her misery, fell fast asleep.

Sir Thomas did not submit so tamely to his fate as his mistress. When no one stirred outside the

house, he crept from his dusty quarters under the woodshed and, sniffing diligently every passing breeze and making a wide detour around the sleepless 'coon, he reached the road that led down to the river ford, over which he had been unwillingly transported that afternoon.

Down the bank to the muddy margin of the river he picked his way, and then, his beautiful yellow eyes shining angrily, he leaped back up the bank and set about investigating Daniel's triangular pen.

Daniel and Joseph John had spent the late evening at that pen, piling in more boulders. Sir Thomas smelt about their footprints with dislike, climbed the logs of the pen, and looked out across the river.

It was no use. No cat could be expected to jump that breadth of water. Sir Thomas climbed down again and sensibly returned to his starting-place, but he meowed sorrowfully under his breath from time to time as he trotted along.

On the doorstep of the weaving-cabin he paused to lick his wet paws and underfur dry and clean. Then he stood upon his hind legs against the door and scratched at the iron latch. It was an easy-going latch, intended only to hold the door against wind and weather, not against visitors.

Under Sir Thomas's paw it lifted easily and the door swung in. Sir Thomas entered with dignity, turned his shining eyes this way and that, and

selected as the best spot for his repose Judith's satin cloak at David's feet. He leaped up lightly, curled himself around with his fine tail across his nose, and went at once to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID AND DENNY

BEFORE any one else had wakened, Sir Thomas, uncommonly hungry, slipped down from David's bed and went out through the door he had opened the night before to find the ham bone he had refused from Robert Barclay's hands.

Judith was also hungry when she wakened. She had no idea what time it might be, but through her narrow chimney windows she saw bright sunshine on the heavy dew. She dressed quietly, hoping not to wake David, but the little boy hailed her reproachfully as she turned from descending the ladder.

'Car'linian! Thee left the door open last night!'

It was the most balmy of summer mornings and undoubtedly it would be too hot for comfort before noon, but Judith refused to argue.

'Did thee close the door, David?'

'Yes, I can close a door!' David answered crossly. 'It was only last winter that I couldn't walk, when I had rheumatism. We had the doctor all the way from Pittsville to see me! He left a doctor book for Mother, and I'm reading it to find out what I'm suffering from now.'

From a little shelf at the head of his bed he produced a sturdy, brown leather-bound volume.

‘The name of the book is “Gunn’s Domestic Medicine,”’ he informed Judith proudly. ‘I can’t always tell what it means, even where I know all the words, and I’m not sure whether I have Consumption or Palsy or what. Denny looked in the book and he said he thought I might be suffering from Convulsions or Fits, which-are-at-all-times-alarming-and-dangerous, but Mother says he was teasing me.’

‘Mother doesn’t want me to read Dr. Gunn, but it’s much more interesting than the Bible. I’m tired of the Bible. Judith, will thee read Dr. Gunn to me and explain it? I won’t call thee Car’linian any more, if thee will do that!’

‘I’ll get thee a cup of milk now,’ said Judith, ‘just like my little sister Polly has for her breakfast.’

David pondered this possibility. ‘There was a friend of Dr. Gunn’s who had Consumption, and he ate milk and water, with a little bread dried in the oven and pounded. But maybe I don’t suffer from Consumption. Maybe it’s Palsy and the book doesn’t say what to eat for Palsy. Does Polly suffer from some ailment?’

‘She suffers from Increasing Appetite,’ Judith answered gravely, ‘and milk is very good for that. Try it and see.’

‘Does David want milk?’ his mother asked in pleased surprise, when Judith came into the kitchen

with her request. 'His sleep has done him good. I didn't wake you on that account, though it is nearly six o'clock and breakfast is about ready.

'Now wouldn't thee eat with David this morning and keep his mind contented? He is too smart a child to be sick; his fancy gets him into mischief when he isn't up and doing. I can't separate him from that doctor book, and he puzzles out enough of the words, right or wrong, to give himself harmful notions. He thinks he has had half the complaints listed in the book!

'Thee may take this bread I've toasted and take two cups on yon waiter, and then thee can go down to the spring-house and dip up some milk from the crock at the far end of the trough. David used to like his milk with the cream stirred back into it.'

Judith took up the painted tin tray and followed a narrow gravelly path that ran from the back kitchen door past the weaving-cabin and down the side of the bluff, stopping below a little spring whose clear waters rose under the very roots of a tough old linden tree. The tree had long ago lost its top, but still it possessed a bushy fringe of lower branches that leafed and bloomed every year for the delectation of the bees, and shaded the household water supply.

Henry Huff had set the log cabin here twenty years before, chiefly because of the spring between the linden roots. Not only did it furnish his family

a never-failing supply of water for drinking and washing, but its overflow, running away underground through a wooden conduit, was equally useful. It entered one side of the little house across the spring path, where it spread out to ripple along a wide trough paved with cobblestones; and in its coolness were set the family supply of milk, butter, and clabber cheese, in thick brown crocks and jars.

Last night's milk, cooled in this efficient refrigerator, showed a covering of yellow cream half an inch thick. Judith stirred the cream through it hastily, aware of a tremendous appetite. She was so fully intent on reaching David's bedside quickly with her delectable burden that she did not notice the forlorn figure that dodged back from the cabin doorstep as she approached and stood concealed in the angle of the chimney as she entered.

When she was out of sight the old colored man returned cautiously to his tending of the trumpet-vine, but he was not counting on the speed with which the milk and toast disappeared.

'I want some more,' said David, quite forgetting to consult Dr. Gunn.

'So do I,' Judith answered heartily; and opening the door, she caught the bent old man fairly, before he could escape.

At the sight of her he shrank together, huddling over the young vine; but as she stood motionless, staring down at him, he got to his feet and ducked

his head respectfully, with an embarrassed grin. He looked like nothing so much as a dog that has been discovered in forbidden quarters and waits for punishment.

'Duberry!' Judith exclaimed. 'I left you at Grandmother's!'

'You goin' tell her 'bout me, Miss Judith?' he quavered. 'I didn' look for you same place as me,' he apologized.

'How did you ever get *here*?'

'Followed you' ma an' you-all. You didn' know.'

'Followed *us*?'

'Dey does it,' he explained humbly. 'I heard 'em say many a time dat one of d' bes' ways to make yo' way up heah. Follow a mover's wagon, an' if folks s'picious you, say you b'long to d' wagon ahead. Dat's whut I do, Miss Judith. I find out when you-all wuz aimin' to start, an' den dat night I took up d' Virginny Pike afte' you. Daytimes I hid up: nighttimes I hurried so I could ketch up. Once I got caught, but I say I b'long to yo' ma: jus' got lef' behin'. So dey let me go on. Dey used to movers along Virginny Pike.'

'What did you eat?' Judith's curiosity was even stronger than her disapproval.

'Befo' I start out I git some side meat an' cook it all up. Dat wuz all I had 'ceptin' scraps I could find aroun' yo' campfires. Afte' you-all cross Ohio

rive' it wuz mo' easy. I could buy vittles north of d' 'Hio.'

'But you never had any money, Duberry!'

He studied his toes carefully before replying and Judith saw now that both his bare feet were bandaged. 'No, Miss Judith,' he admitted finally. 'No, I neve' did have no money. But yo' gran'ma say give yo' dat purse befo' you go: and when you wouldn' take it, and I hand it back to her, blim! she threwed it in d' big boxwood bush. An' dere it lays till I picks it out. I don' rightly know how much cash money dere wuz but it took me up here.'

He ventured to raise his watery eyes to Judith.

'You goin' to tell yo' gran'ma, Miss Judith? Standin' dere, you looks d' spit'n' image of her!

'I — I reckons I could move on. But dese folks is mighty good to me. My feets, dey hu't me till I couldn' keep up wid you-all, las' week. I had to lay by; an' when I start out ag'in trompin' on my so' feets, I los' d' trail. I didn' know whe' wuz I goin'; didn' have nobody to follow no mo'.

'I got skeered of roads. Seemed like d' rive' might be mo' safe. Den one evenin' late I come up along d' rive' bank and run right into Mist' Dan, workin' on his bridge, fo' I knowed bridge nor man nor nobody else wuz dere. But all he says wuz, Did I want a drink or somethin' to eat, and did I want a lift farthe' no'th?

'I wuz tired, Miss Judith. I say, No, what I

want is des to stay right here an' rest my poor feets. An' he say, All right, we risk it!

'An' Mis' Huff, she give me clean clo'es an' liniment fo' my feets, an' Mist' Huff he goin' pay me wages!

'Miss Judith, I wishes I could stay here!'

'Do you know what Grandmother would do to you if she found you stole that money, Duberry?'

'I knows what she done to me widout I stole nothin',' he answered dejectedly. 'She had me whup for movin' her li'l' small miniature rose so late in d' season it die: but she know as well as I do, she tol' me herse'f, Move dat rose whe' it git mo' sun. She jus' mad 'cause you leavin', Miss Judith: she want somebody whup; an' I was him!

'She whup Sukey, too, fo' takin' yo' ridin' hat, Miss Judith.

'Is — is yo' go'n' tell her 'bout me?'

'I don't know,' Judith answered shortly. 'I ought to. Take this tray and go get Master David and me some more breakfast from the big house.'

The old man hastened off while Judith waited on the doorstep, but he was soon back, holding out the empty tray fearfully.

'Mis' Huff she say I mus' eat my brekkus an' git out to de fiel' wid de men. She say, Miss Judith, you come git yo' own brekkus.

'Ain't my fault,' he protested, at Judith's angry

gesture, evidently uncertain whether her displeasure or that of the Huffs was most to be feared.

Somewhere in Judith's make-up lay a streak of justice, though it had not been much developed.

'No, it isn't your fault, Duberry,' she agreed. 'Go on and eat your breakfast.'

And to the impatient voice within the cabin she answered, 'Yes, David, I'm coming soon!'

As she made fresh toast before the coals she thought, 'Why should I tell Grandmother? It would do me no good to have Duberry taken back. And besides, what right have I over him? He works in the fields and I work in the kitchen, and we both eat at the same table.'

But she was not sufficiently generous to tell him her decision; partly because she was not unwilling for him to be as miserable as she herself was; and he went off to the field with the same familiar panic in his breast that had driven him over the steep mountain roads through dark nights to this quiet spot where he had hoped to remain unmolested.

Judith herself was unhappy enough through the long June morning. Since she had had a good night's rest and eaten a hearty breakfast, sensible Mary Huff considered her pupil ready to begin at once to learn the daily routine. Awkward and unskilled she certainly was, but so much the more reason for correcting her faults early.

'I've taught my five boys to keep house, more or

less,' she told Judith, 'but I have to let them go when Father needs them for his work. I hope when I have thee trained that thee'll stay with me better than they have!

'No, that butter has not begun to come yet. When thee can see little yellow specks on the churn dasher, it has come, and that is the time to pour a dipper of cold water into the cream, so the butter will harden.'

Judith had been given a dress of Mary Huff's, exactly like that which the older woman was wearing, with the extra room at the waist bound in by the strings of her neat apron. She had reached such depths of forlornness that she no longer cared how she looked, although she was certain of appearing both unlovely and queer in the coarse plain linen. If she had been told that Mary Huff considered her dressed so, as the most beautiful girl she had ever seen, she would not have believed it.

But Mary Huff was very far from complimenting Judith. She could recognize good looks in her own family or elsewhere, but she rated mere beauty well below character and accomplishments. She hoped for a good deal from Judith's character, considering the Holloway ancestry, but her accomplishments in any useful line were distressingly absent. She had proved herself clumsy at dishwashing, she was thorough, but slow at bedmaking, and she had actually never churned before in her life. Still, re-

membering David's quiet night and his excellent breakfast, she found it less difficult to be patient with the girl's ignorance.

'Give me the butter paddle,' she said, as Judith struggled unsuccessfully to mold the stubborn yellow mass in the big wooden butter bowl. 'Thee sees — like this! Pat it down evenly along the top, and shape it up like this at the sides.' Under her skillful, work-reddened hands a square, even block of butter took shape at once. She resigned the bowl to Judith again.

'We don't bother to make pound molds in the summer; but does thee want to mark a pattern across the top? I usually make crosses or V's with the butter paddle.'

Judith held the stubby butter paddle poised a moment, and then slowly, but with a sure hand, she furrowed a pattern of alternate leaf and flower on the smooth surface.

'Why, it's the tulip-tree leaf and blossom,' Mary Huff exclaimed with pleasure. 'That's real pretty. Thee shall make that every time!'

Judith carried the butter bowl down to the spring-house with a lighter heart. 'If I can find enough things that I can do,' she thought, 'perhaps it won't be so bad living here.'

It was discouraging to have to admit that afternoon that she could not knit a stocking. Knitting was an accomplishment that Mary Huff believed every girl above the age of five possessed.

She said to Judith after the noon dinner, with the air of indulging her, 'Thee can take this sock I've started and sit with David and rest. David will be glad of thy company.'

Judith took the ball of gray wool without comment, hoping to learn the art of knitting without instruction. It looked easy enough as she had seen it done. She found the cabin warm and stuffy with all the windows closed again; and David, on his tumbled bed, was inclined to be cross.

'Shut the door, Car' — Oh, I said I wouldn't call thee that any more. Judith, read to me! I asked thee this morning.'

'I have to knit,' Judith answered, feeling almost as cross as David.

She pulled a little straight-backed chair nearer the window, managing to drop one of the knitting needles as she sat down, and when she had recovered it from under the loom she found that the stitches had already begun to ravel back.

'Can't thee pick up stitches any better than that?' David demanded. 'I can. Let me show thee.'

He took over the sock and, to Judith's dismay, whipped out the other two needles as well. This done, he raveled the sock twice around, and with a practiced hand and eye, picked up the stitches afresh.

'There it is!' said he, with a lordly air. 'No, don't hold thy yarn like that! It goes on the other

hand; and twist it once around thy little finger, or it will be too loose. No, pick up the stitch with the needle before thee throws the yarn over.'

'I don't know how to knit,' Judith defended herself before this small expert. 'I never had to.'

'Thee needn't be proud of it,' David remarked.

He lay back, regarding a familiar knot hole in the ceiling. When he had been ill in the winter, and often since then, the knot hole had looked down on him at night and winked evilly in the firelight, so that he had been afraid. Last night the knot hole had not once winked, and to-day it still looked like a knot hole instead of a wicked eye. That must be because Judith was living in the loft, he decided; he was glad she had come.

'Looky here,' said he, rousing again. 'Thee's getting that too tight; pretty soon thee won't be able to move the needles. That was the way I did when I was learning to knit. And thee isn't ribbing the sock; thee's just knitting it straight along. Mother will have to take it out. I tell thee what: I'll knit for thee and thee can read to me.'

Judith lifted despairing brown eyes from the irregular row of stitches on her needle.

'I'll have to learn some time.' Even this short experience with the Huff family had taught her that they considered ignorance no excuse for not learning.

'I'll tell Mother thee isn't ready for socks yet,'

David offered in a large, protecting manner. 'Thee ought to begin on garters. I did.'

Judith said, 'If I read to thee may I open the windows?'

David could also bargain. 'Yes, if thee will give me thy fine cloak again; Mother said it was too good for me to wear out, and she hung it up on the peg yonder. And put on a pretty frock again, Judith, so I can look at thee!'

It was agreed. Judith straightened the cot, propped up David with the folded blankets, and spread the soft cloak over him. His needles clicked away, while Judith climbed to the loft, to reappear for his benefit in the billowing dull-blue silk.

'Oh!' said David, when he saw her. He was too absorbed in the picture even to smile, and his busy fingers forgot to knit.

'It's like the periwinkle blossoms that grow by the side of the house,' he said. 'Or Johnny-jump-ups; the little early ones. Sit down by me, Judith.'

Judith took up the leather-bound 'Gunn's Domestic Medicine,' already a little rubbed on its edges, and falling open most easily to Consumption. 'Consumption spreads its ravages in the haunts of gayety, fashion, and folly —' Dr. Gunn led off. This did not sound like a description of David's situation, but the next sentence was more apt: 'Thousands are yearly falling in the springtime of life by the untimely stroke of this most fatal of diseases.'

Judith shivered. She leafed backward and forward through the book in search of a more suitable subject. 'Cholera, symptoms of.' 'Blood letting.' 'Intemperance.' She grasped at a faint hope.

'David, listen to this. Does thee know these plants? It says:

"Ask some physician of eminence to give you in plain common English the meaning of those mysterious and high-sounding names you see plastered on bottles, glass jars, gallipots, and drawers in a drug-store or Doctor's shop. There you may see in large and imposing capitals — *Datura Stramonium*, which means simply stinkweed or vulgarly James-town weed; *Tanacetum Vulgar*, which in English means Common Tansy; *Chenopodium Anthelmenticum*, good Heavens, what a name for Jerusalem Oak —"

'Maybe that first one is jimson weed,' David interrupted. 'And Mother's got a great clump of tansy by the garden gate; but I don't know Jerusalem Oak.'

'Neither do I,' said Judith. 'I don't know many of these. It says *Cornus Florida* is dogwood. I know dogwood. It blooms in great sheets of white across the Virginia hills ——' she broke off with a tightening of the throat.

'It blooms here, too,' said David unconcernedly. 'Read the rest, Judith.'

He could claim a surprisingly wide acquaintance

with the list of medicinally useful plants enumerated by the vigilant Dr. Gunn.

‘If I was well, I’d take thee out and show thee lots of them,’ he told Judith. ‘There’ll be penny-royal out on the pasture hills now, and may-apples at the edge of the woods, and there’s spicewood down the bluffs.’

‘In the back of the book it tells how to use these plants,’ Judith said, pleased that her exploration of the volume was turning out so fortunately.

‘Here’s spicewood. “It is known to every person of intelligence in the United States” — that’s thee, David; I don’t seem to be a person of intelligence — “It is used as a medicine in the Middle and Southern States, as well as in the Western country, and operates in giving tone to the stomach and strength to the general system.”’

‘Let’s go out to-morrow and find some spicewood for tea, David, to give strength to thy “general system.”’

‘I’m too tired,’ David said, yawning. He lay back on his pillow and let the knitting drop from his white hands.

‘Shut thy eyes, then,’ said Judith, ‘and I’ll sing thee a song. It’s a French song about a soldier who goes to the war and doesn’t know when he may come back. His name is Malbrough.’

‘My folks don’t sing songs,’ David answered, sleepily surprised, but his eyelids soon drooped and

closed as Judith crooned the simple tune over and over.

Grandmother Lankester had been very proud of Judith when she had learned all the verses of 'Malbrough s'en va-t'en guerre.' Judith did not know French well; few accomplishments had been taught her thoroughly; but little songs like this she had picked up quickly from the French tutor who had stayed at Lankester's one winter and might have stayed longer if he had been willing to endure Grandmother's occasional furies as to the airs that he, a penniless Frenchman, gave himself in her house. In the spring he had gone off on foot, his fiddle under his threadbare elbow, but still with an air, humming to himself, 'Ne sait quand reviendra.'

'And neither do I know when I'll return,' she thought. 'But surely I will some day. I wish Sukey were here now to give me a cold drink. Well — I'll get it for myself.'

She was still singing softly as she reached the spring. From the shade of the linden tree Dennis O'Brien sprang up with delighted alacrity.

'Let me give you a cool drink, Miss Judith. Sit down and rest. Do, then!'

Judith accepted the long-handled drinking-gourd gravely, and, with a little hesitation, the near-by tree-stump to which Dennis grandly waved her. Though his clothes and his hands were dusty and there was a muddy smudge across one round cheek,

his black hair lay back smoothly and his manners were elaborate.

‘I niver thought, when I came up from the field for a small drink (and indeed I was nearly overcome with the heat, Miss Judith) that there would be a beautiful lady in a grand dress for me to rest me eyes on and talk with! This family, Miss Judith, is kind and well-meaning; but they give no time to the pleasures of conversation. Always they must be doin’ somethin’ or makin’ somethin’. Isn’t that true?’

‘I haven’t been here long,’ Judith reminded him, though inwardly agreeing.

‘No, but you have a discriminatin’ mind. Faith, I was lonesome before you came, Miss Judith! No one to understand how I felt!

‘Can you not sit idle and rest a moment? Must they be puttin’ that coarse yarn in your pretty hands every spare second? And what’s the use of socks at all this weather?’ He took the knitting from her and laid it severely at arm’s length.

‘I’ll be bound, Miss Judith, that you and I came here from the same state, and ’tis the most beautiful and best-governed of them all!’

‘Virginia?’ Judith looked her surprise.

‘Did I not tell you so? And from what county?’

‘From Bedford. Have you been there?’

Denny would gladly have obliged Judith by hailing from any county she might name; to find that

he actually knew the place she mentioned was better luck than he had hoped for; he fairly bounced with excitement.

‘Twas from Lynchburg I came with my parents, God rest their souls, two years ago! And often I’ve wished meself back. Some day I’ll take me little bateau and go!’

‘But I never heard of any O’Briens in Lynchburg.’

‘Oh, we did not stay long,’ Denny replied carelessly. ‘Me father was disappointed airy in life; in fact I am not sure but it was me grandfather was disappointed. I would not mention it to every one, and the Huffs laugh at me if I do; but our ancestral estates was wrongly and cruelly taken away from us. Me father felt there was no hope of comin’ to his own again, an’ he left Ireland, and moved from spot to spot, tryin’ to forget, but he never could cure his sorrow.

‘I would be glad to be back on the steep hills of the James, lookin’ down into its brown waters. I was near gettin’ a job to boss a crew of niggers at the warehouses, when me father hitched up his horses once more and on we went for his last journey.

‘They understand the niggers better there, Miss Judith. Up here they spoil them. What do you think now? Mister Huff says he will pay this old Duberry wages! And him glad enough to work for

his bed and board! Why shouldn't he be? Any one may see he's a runaway and like enough with a reward advertised for him, if a body knew where to look for it.'

Judith kept so discreet a countenance that Denny, who had expected encouragement, was disconcerted, and paused in his flow of confidences to decide which tack to take next.

Judith herself supplied a new direction. 'Did you know my Grandmother Lankester's place, Dennis? I don't suppose you did. It was out in the country. But maybe you knew Father's Lynchburg house. He built it on the top of the bluff; from the back gallery you could see all up and down the river and the hills.'

'I have heard of the Lankester estate, many a time,' Denny answered readily. 'They sent a fine lot of tobacco down to the warehouses in the fall. Your father's house — I might know that. Was there a pink-bloomin' bush by the door?'

Denny did not go on to tell, as he might, how he had stood by the pink-blooming bush to eat a cold biscuit and a slice of ham given to him at his request from the kitchen. Perhaps he had forgotten.

'It was the crêpe myrtle,' sighed Judith, remembering with a wave of homesickness its fragile, fantastic petals.

'Now I remember, your father had a fine business at his warehouse,' Denny went on. 'What hap-



'YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE — I MIGHT KNOW THAT. WAS THERE
A PINK BLOOMIN' BUSH BY THE DOOR?'

pened? Was he cheated out of his own like the O'Briens? How comes his daughter workin' in the kitchen of strangers?'

'My mother,' Judith stated in a colorless voice, 'was Quaker-born; and when my father died she felt it was her duty to free my father's slaves and set them up with places of their own. That took nearly all our money. I used to live at Grandmother Lankester's, but Grandmother was angry with me on Mother's account, and when Mother sent for me she was glad to have me go.'

Denny made a little compassionate clucking noise. 'It's what I'm always sayin', Miss Judith, and you'll agree with me. These Quakers are all dreamers. Mad dreamers! They seem so sober an' sensible on the outside that they deceive you often; but don't let yourself be beguiled! Some scheme like this of your mother's, useless an' wild, is sure to come up!'

He slid a little nearer and spoke in a low tone.

'Take this family here, the Huff family. They work hard, and I won't say they haven't done well, in their way. I've seen much of the world, and I'm willin' to say they've done well.

'People tell me, and I believe it, that Mister and Mistress Huff came here with no more than money enough to buy this land on the two sides of the river, and land was cheap then, too. 'Twas all forested so that nothing could be planted till the

trees was cleared off; and now, in twenty years, they have the good fields, and pigs and cattle; and they have sent the boys to school. Dan, now, is better educated than I am, so far as books go,' Denny admitted with great generosity. 'He can read the Latin, and figure in the higher mathematics; though of course he does not know the world so well.

'But do they settle down to enjoy their leisure, or maybe build them a fine house? They do not! They work on, hot or cold, like niggers. They save their money. And what crack-brained scheme do you suppose they are hatchin', Miss Judith?' His voice rose higher.

'You'd never guess. I'll tell you. They plan to build them a railroad!'

He leaned back, well satisfied with Judith's look of wonder. 'It's the truth. A railroad!'

'A railroad!' the girl exclaimed. 'They've been trying to get a railroad built into Lynchburg for years, and Grandmother says they never will get it done!'

An unaccountably guilty expression was creeping across Denny's complacent face. Judith, following his glance, found herself looking up into the stern young eyes of Daniel Huff, coming down the path to the spring.

'Get the jug, Denny, and tote it along,' he ordered quietly. 'Some of us want a drink over in the field.'

Denny sulkily obeyed, and went off with the jug, his shoulders drooping expressively, as if it were a great and unjust burden. Dan stood by until he was well on his way, stooped for a hasty drink, and then followed, without a word to Judith.

CHAPTER V

DAN'S DREAM

DAVID waked in time for his supper, after which he clamored for company.

‘He does seem better to-day,’ Mary Huff said happily to Judith. ‘We put him out in the weaving-room last winter when he was so sick that noise troubled him; but he has never wanted to be moved back, nor cared much to have the boys around. The twins have the most time for him and they are likely to tumble over him and hurt him.’

‘Does thee want to sit with him now, Judith? Thomas Ellwood can finish the dishes.’

Judith dropped the dishcloth at once, and Thomas Ellwood took it up, sticking out his tongue at the deserter, when his mother’s attention was elsewhere.

‘I don’t know what to tell thee to work on as thee sits with David,’ Mary Huff said in real perplexity. That Judith might spend any time in idleness did not occur to her. ‘It seems I’ll have to teach thee to knit. Does thee have any mending? Or can thee sew?’ She had already ceased to take Judith’s accomplishments for granted.

‘Oh, yes, I can sew,’ Judith answered thankfully. ‘I wondered — would thee let me make David a

little suit out of one of my old dresses? It would be like making doll clothes for Polly.'

'Thy material would be far too good for a little boy,' the other protested. 'I'll get down some flannel of my own weaving, a nice butternut.'

'I don't think David would like it so well,' Judith stood her ground. 'He loves pretty colors and smooth cloth. I have a blue riding-habit that I cut into for a doll's dress; there is enough left for a little boy's suit. Maybe David will want to get up to wear it when he sees it finished.'

'A doll's dress!' It was plain that this extravagance took Mary Huff aback. 'Well, if thee's cut into it already — But remember, I can't replace that fine cloth.'

'I'll never need it again,' Judith answered; the coarse linen, to which she had returned for the supper work, scratched her arms and shoulders unmercifully, but she went off, not too unhappily, to acquaint David with the plans for his new wardrobe.

The little boy's pleasure was great, and it grew when Judith assured him that he should have a white muslin shirt to set off the blue jacket. He forgot Dr. Gunn altogether, and sat up in bed watching Judith rip the seams of the voluminous, trained riding-skirt.

'Will there be enough for long breeches?' he inquired anxiously.

‘Plenty for two pairs, if thee wants them.’

‘Oh, Judith! I’m sorry I ever called thee Car’linian,’ David said earnestly, his face glowing with delight.

Judith spread the wide breadths over the cabin floor; at a knock on the door she looked up impatiently from her planning and was displeased to see Daniel Huff on the doorstep.

‘May I come in?’ he asked in some embarrassment. ‘I didn’t know dressmaking was going on.’

‘It isn’t dressmaking,’ David proclaimed hastily. ‘It’s tailoring. She’s making a suit for me. Isn’t thee, Judith?’

‘I am. Come in,’ she told Daniel, as he still stood outside. ‘Did you want something?’

At Judith’s curt question Dan’s head came up; without answering he tiptoed carefully around the edges of the cloth to David’s bed, where he sat down, putting Judith’s cloak aside, after a curious glance at its unfamiliar folds. David promptly climbed over into his lap.

‘There! I can see better what Judith is doing. I don’t want that old blanket, Dan. Put the cloak over me. I like to feel the fur; it tickles!’

‘How can thee tell the way to cut it, Judith? Doesn’t thee want Mother’s pattern? It’s big enough for Father, but she can make it do for Dan and Joseph John by putting tucks around the waist. She just makes up the pattern for the twins

and sometimes Rob says they look the same in the back as in the front.'

'I'm just going to cut the coat to-night, and I can do that by measuring thee, without a pattern,' Judith said shortly.

She had not bargained for an audience, and she was glad when Daniel rose and left the cabin with no more explanation than he had given for entering it. It was exasperating to have him return almost at once, protecting the flame of a lighted candle, which he set down on the weaver's bench where it would best illuminate her work; afterward taking his former seat to resume his grave watching of her work.

'Build me a fire, Dan,' David teased. 'I want a fire, so I won't take cold from the night air.'

Dan started to rise obediently, but Judith flared at once. 'If there is a fire built here, I won't sew another minute. Neither will I sleep in that loft and be roasted to-night.'

David began to whimper and his big brother looked troubled. 'Ever since he was sick he has had a fire here.'

Judith opened her mouth to state precisely what she thought of spoiled little David Huff, and the Huff family who spoiled him; but the tears on David's candlelit face were too much for her just indignation. She rose stiffly from the floor and came over to the bed.

‘Get up, please,’ she said wearily to Dan. ‘Let me straighten his covers.’

To David she said, ‘Has thee noticed my gold thimble? See the design around it? Those are dogs chasing a deer. I’ll let thee hold it now and to-morrow when I’m not using it. Thee may keep my scissors for me, too, and cut the little left-over scraps into a tiny suit, like the big one I’m making for thee.’

As she spoke her hands were busy. When she had finished David lay in a tidy bed with the fur of the cloak convenient to hand, and on his finger was the gold thimble to revolve and admire.

‘Let me wear it to-night, Judith, while I sleep?’

‘Yes, keep it safe for me.’

To Dan she remarked pointedly, ‘I think he will be ready to go to sleep soon.’

Dan squared his shoulders. He had a temper as well as Judith, though it was still under control.

‘I’m not ready to go yet,’ he said definitely. He pushed the candlestick over and sat down on the weaver’s bench. ‘Better take that chair. I’ll help pick up this stuff after a while. I should judge thee had worked long enough for one day, soft as thee is.’

For answer Judith knelt on the floor and began to cut into the cloth. Dan’s mouth grew set, and his eyes narrowed.

David said happily, ‘This is a pretty thimble, Judith. I think all thy things are pretty. Isn’t

her hair pretty, Dan? I'm sick and tired of red hair!'

Neither of his companions paid any attention, and David returned to the game of trying the thimble on each of his fingers in turn.

Presently Daniel swallowed and began to speak, with some effort. 'What I wanted to say was about our railroad. I heard Denny talking about it this afternoon. Denny talks too much and what he says doesn't always fit the facts. Will thee listen?'

'I can't help myself,' Judith answered tartly.

The big hand lying on Dan's knee suddenly made itself into a fist, but he went on.

'I want thee to understand our situation. Denny doesn't take that into account.

'We live back here about halfway between two markets for our produce — our grain and our meat and so on. If we get a fair price for anything we have to haul it either to Kingston on the north or Pittsville on the south; and if we want the best prices we have to take our wagon-loads all the way down to Cincinnati. And then we have to haul back what we trade for — tools and sugar and salt and nearly everything we buy. That's true of most other families up and down the river.

'Usually we go down to Cincinnati once a year, in the winter, when the roads are frozen hard, so the wagons won't risk getting hung up in the mud. When the roads are solid it is three days there and

three days back, but if there's a thaw we never know how much time we may waste.

'When we drive a herd of hogs down we have to count on two or three weeks. We ought not to spare the time, but it's our only chance to get cash. And while I don't mind hard work I always think I could be better occupied than chasing wild razor-backs through the mud and driving them across half-frozen creeks. I'd like to pen them up in a car and haul them right along in spite of themselves!

'Father believes our roads will be improved in time, but the State can't help us. Each man keeps up the stretch of road along his land or else he lets it go. Nobody else bothers with it. We maintain a fair road for half a mile either side of the river, but between us and town there is a farm or two where the owners just scratch along, and they don't care if their stretch of highway is one mudhole after the other. Father has told them he'd help put down rails for a corduroy road at the swampy places, but they won't stir a finger for improvement.'

'That's the Lacys,' David contributed.

'That's the Lacys. But the name doesn't matter. There is always somebody like the Lacys, no difference which direction we go, and we all have to pull through their mud, even if we keep up our own road.

'Father and I have talked it over for a good while, and we think there ought to be a railroad

built from Kingston to Pittsville to meet the line that is coming up from Cincinnati. And as soon as we get enough money subscribed for stock we intend to begin.'

He regarded Judith anxiously.


'Thee can see, can't thee, that it isn't any of Denny's "visionary schemes"? It's a public improvement that ought to be attended to; it would help all this part of the State.'

'How could *you* build a railroad?' Judith asked impolitely. 'Back in Lynchburg they've been talking about getting a railroad for years and they don't have one yet. And there are very good business men in Lynchburg.'

'Grandmother says there is some sense in a canal, though she thinks the river is good enough. But a railway is just an expensive plaything, she says.'

'A canal would freeze over in the winter time. A railroad would run all the year round. And it would cost no more to build than a canal.'

Dan settled himself to explain very carefully, ruffling his red-gold crest in his effort to be clear and persuasive.

'Father and I count that we could build a grade for our railroad along the second bottom of the river valley, where it is level most of the way. With some help I can survey the line myself. I've made a rough "view" of it already. 

'First we level our grade, and then we dig paral-

lel trenches along it far enough apart for the tracks, and we lay good heavy timbers in those trenches for mud sills. Then we put down cross-ties every few feet and spike them into the mud sills, and on the cross ties we lay the four-by-six oak stringers to carry the iron track. The stringers are wedged with wooden wedges, and the flat-iron bars, the tracks, are dove-tailed together at the ends and spiked down onto the stringers,' Dan related, with loving interest in all the details.

'I have gone to look at the tracks every time I've been down in Cincinnati. They're not hard to lay. All that is needed is time and work and money. We've got time and we can work, and we hope to find the money. I'm counting on my corn crop to pay something toward my share of stock in the company. Father is afraid we won't be able to begin for three or four years yet, but I hope it won't be so long. Doesn't it sound reasonable to thee?'

'A railroad needs engines as well as tracks,' Judith answered stubbornly.

'Oh, the engines! Father looked at different kinds when he was in New York State a year ago last winter. He hasn't made up his mind which kind is best. They are still making improvements on them. I'd like to be the engineer myself, but Father thinks Joseph John would be better. Joseph John is a good mechanic.

‘But, Judith — Thee won’t encourage Denny in his talk? It could cause trouble. People might think our own family was not agreed.’

Judith let her work drop into her lap as she looked up at Daniel, seated before her on the roughly carpentered weaver’s bench in his home-made clothes; she frowned at his heavy boots, also made at home, and so far from being fitted that they could be worn equally well on the right or the left foot. She surveyed slowly the little cabin: the wide, bare boards of its unpainted floor, its smoke-darkened ceiling, as well as the ladder which was the stair by which she must climb to her room in the loft; and she made a despairing gesture.

‘You live in — in this sort of place. You work day and night; you do all your own work. And then you want me to tell you that I think it is reasonable for you to build a railroad!’

‘Why not?’ Dan was genuinely astonished. ‘We like to work! Why shouldn’t we build a railroad because we work?’

‘I couldn’t make you understand, I suppose. But why are you telling this to me? I can’t help with your railroad!’

‘Of course not!’ The young man was getting to the end of his patience. ‘Of course not! But thee can hinder. I have been trying to explain it so thee will not tell thy grandfather, Joseph Halloway, anything that will give him a wrong impression. He has

been interested and we hope he will take stock; it is a hard thing to get money out here.'

'Oh!' said Judith. 'I see. This has all been said to Grandfather?'

'If thee wants to put it that way.'

The girl struggled to her feet. 'In the first place,' she said, 'I don't think Grandfather has so much money.'

'He has enough,' Dan remarked quietly.

'And in the second place, it was a waste of time to tell me all this. I don't remember half of it and more than likely that half is wrong. Mud sills, stringers, stock —' she enumerated scornfully.

She expected Dan to go, now that his instruction had failed of effect, but he still sat on his bench, seeing Judith for the first time as a person, instead of an obstacle in the path of his railroad.

Around her slender figure his mother's dress hung limply, and even to his inexperienced eyes it appeared not quite suitable to the girl. The candlelight shone faintly on the fine tendrils of hair around her face; it cast deep shadows that intensified the fine modeling of nose and chin and cheekbone. It occurred to Dan, though vaguely, that the rough background was perhaps as unsuitable to such a face as the coarse linen dress. He looked about him critically.

'Thee doesn't like this,' he stated. 'What does thee think is wrong with it?'

'It doesn't matter,' Judith answered wearily, moving over to lean against the fireplace.

'Sit down,' Dan said, persuasively. 'I want to know. David's asleep. We won't bother him. Tell me what it was like where thee came from.'

'Oh, very well,' Judith answered. She stooped and found a bit of charcoal among the ashes. 'Bring the candle over here.' She began to sketch in broad black strokes on the sand-scoured boards of the floor by the hearth.

'This is Grandmother Lankester's house. It is built of brick; the woodwork is white. These pillars at the doorway are white, and so are the dormer windows. You can see that it is in good proportion, and so is this formal garden. These geometrical designs I am making are worked out in hedges and flower-beds and paths.

'Inside there are shutters to keep out the heat, and there is a beautiful stairway with carved banisters, and wall-paper with pictures; and the floors are always waxed and shining.

'But I don't know that all this would interest a person who cares for railroads.'

This last was lost on Dan, who was watching the picture grow with great attention. 'We could have a brick house,' he said confidently. 'But it takes a good while to burn the bricks, and we would always rather do something else. Maybe when we get the railroad built Father will want a new house.'

‘I don’t know about building railroads,’ said Judith. ‘Perhaps you can do that. But I know you could never take care of a place like Grandmother Lankester’s. There must be servants to do the work.’

Dan was not shaken. ‘We could do it if we wanted to — if we put our minds to it. I don’t know whether we will ever want to or not. It doesn’t seem important to me now. Our buildings are solid and warm.’

Judith knelt gazing at her sketch; she roused only when Dan had carefully folded the cloth spread on the floor and laid it on the weaver’s bench.

Then she inquired sweetly, ‘Which one of the servants shall I ask to scrub this off the floor in the morning?’

‘That reminds me,’ said Dan. ‘There was another thing I meant to speak about, out of David’s hearing. This old ducky, Duberry, told me to-day where he came from. Nobody had asked him; we didn’t want to know in case inquiry was made about him. He says that thee recognized him, Judith; that he was thy Grandmother Lankester’s slave, and that he is afraid thee will send word to her.’

‘I said I didn’t think thee would do such a thing; but I would ask, because I was not sure how thee might feel about it. I can see thee doesn’t like to eat at the same table with him ——’

‘*Could* you?’ Judith was sarcastic. ‘I am surprised!’



THIS IS GRANDMOTHER LANKESTER'S HOUSE. IT IS BUILT
OF BRICK

'I wasn't surprised,' Dan returned. 'I know most Southerners are not very reasonable about such things ——'

'Oh, go away!' Judith broke in childishly. 'I will not be lectured any more! You don't understand how I feel about anything! You can't!'

Her voice broke; she crossed the floor on swift feet and pulled the cabin door wide open.

Dan hesitated; he heartily disliked running away from a difficult problem, but he had to admit that he did not know how to calm this particular tempest. He shrugged the responsibility off his shoulders and went off across the cobblestones to the house.

This day had been as long as seven, Judith thought, leaning against the closed door. She was too tired to remember just why she had been so angry. Sensible Sir Thomas, who had slipped in just now, was already curled in a soft round heap at David's feet. Judith blew out the candle and climbed to bed.

CHAPTER VI

A SECRET

TIME stood almost still for Judith through mid-summer, though for the Huff family many things of importance were going forward.

Dan's corn in the hot moist bottom-lands, the corn that was to help build a railroad through that same valley, shot up, dark green and sturdy, almost under his eyes. His father's wheat crop was heavy. There would be enough for the year's flour and next year's seed and a good many bushels to sell. To Henry and Mary Huff, who had lived through their first Indiana winter on moldy corn meal and whatever game could be shot in the forests, wheat flour in plenty would always be cause for active rejoicing. The vegetables in Mary Huff's garden grew thriftily under old Duberry's clever hands, and there was prospect of melons in unheard-of abundance from his truck patch in the warm sand of the bottoms.

On the blacksmith forge the fire often glowed red while Joseph John and his father mended a plow point or shod a horse for a neighbor. Blacksmithing was not their trade, but since they were equipped for their own convenience, it would not have been neighborly to refuse a farmer who needed work done and could ill spare the time to go

on to town. Thanks to his growing muscles and his constant practice, Joseph John was considered sufficiently advanced by the middle of the summer to shoe an old and steady nag without assistance, and thereafter he justly regarded himself as well along in his apprenticeship.

Mark, who was not considered old enough to have a colt of his own, like Dan and Joseph John, had broken the red calf to drive to a sledge of his own construction, to the great envy of the twins.

Between their many chores, which any member of the family might impose on them, the twins were gathering together a menagerie of stray wild animals, which they stowed away in cracked jars and cobbled-up pens, from which they were always escaping. The raccoon showed a mysterious cleverness in slipping out of his leather collar, and frequently had to be retrieved from the top of the maple tree; and as for the snakes, Thomas Ellwood remarked sadly that they could hardly be given a nail-hole for fresh air, but that they would manage to sneak out through it.

They would certainly have appropriated Sir Thomas if he had been of a more obliging disposition, but they stood in considerable respect of his scratching ability, and Sir Thomas continued to go where he pleased, when he pleased. He showed no intention of paying for the innumerable biscuits or the ham gravy which he ate, either in entertain-

ment or by mouse-catching; but even the energetic Huffs admitted that he grew more handsome every day, and tolerated his aristocratic idleness.

For Judith the weeks were chiefly marked by David's slow return to health. It had been some days before she had been able to induce the little boy to leave the cabin, and then it was the new blue suit that beguiled him into wearing it for a promenade. In all its blue bravery, clinging tightly to Judith's hand, he had walked out into the level back yard to the edge of the bluff and then had walked shakily back to the cabin.

He had been a very sick child in the winter and he was still thin and weak from lack of exercise, and too intent on the state of his health. But two days later he announced of himself that his legs were rested, and on this excursion he reached the spice-wood bush below the spring-house.

Perhaps it was the odd-tasting tea that he and Judith brewed from its twigs that gave, in the words of Dr. Gunn, 'strength to his general system'; perhaps he had grown more tired than he knew of lying on his bed in the weaving-room; perhaps it was because he had begun to eat and sleep like any other little boy. Whatever the cause Judith and he came soon to wandering out every afternoon, looking along the bluffs for boneset, flower and leaf, or chinkapin bark, or may-apple root, or any of the other simples recommended by the good

Dr. Gunn, in case, David said, he should grow ill again and need medicine. But every day there was more color in his cheeks and more freckles across his nose, and he looked less in need of medicine.

Of mornings Judith was supposed to do her share of the housework, but Grandfather Halloway found the two sitting by the roadside when he came up the hill one July morning. Judith held a lapful of bark, which she seemed to be sorting out, and David's clever fingers knitted away at a sock while he watched the assorting.

'That one's not slippery elm, that's the bark of the yellow poplar, Judith; I know it is,' he was saying as Grandfather pulled up beside them. 'Now we've got it mixed up, let's throw it all away and go back and get some more. I like to walk across Dan's bridge. It makes me feel so queer in my stomach.'

Grandfather Halloway made a mental note that David was not so dawncy; that he seemed, in fact, very peart; just as he was well aware that Judith was pretty as a picture in her Quaker kerchief; but he made no comment. He said,

'It's nearly time for midweek meetin', ain't it? I'm visitin' Pleasant Heights to-day, and I thought I might stop by and take thee along to meetin' with me. I ain't seen thee since we drove out together, and thee ain't been home, has thee?'

David said very quickly, 'Judith and I don't go

to meeting. I'm not strong enough yet and Judith stays home with me. Has thee got any rhubarb in thy garden? We need some. We don't mind whether it is Russian or Turkish or East Indian, though Dr. Gunn says the Turkish is best.'

Grandfather Halloway blinked. 'Rhubarb? None that I know of. Thy mother sent her best love, Judith. She feels badly she ain't got up to see thee yet, but she has had a run of work that she felt she couldn't leave for so much as half a day. I tell her thee's in good hands and she needn't worry. It's a busy time for everybody.'

Judith came eagerly to the wheel. 'I haven't been anywhere, Grandfather, or heard any news. How is Polly? Does she miss me?'

'Polly? Well, she cried for thee the first day, but she settled down to enjoy herself. The last thing I heard she threatened to leave off her sunbunnit and pantalets, so she could climb the crab-apple tree easier.

'Catherine got the place she wanted teaching in the summer session, and I understand Phebe is a right smart bunnit-maker. Charity is up at our house and they all say she is good help. I don't always remember the little girls apart, but they all work hard, I know. How is thee making out?'

'I don't think I'm much use,' Judith said frankly, at which Grandfather frowned. 'Has Mother heard from back home?'

‘Not that she has told me. She is a busy woman, Judith. Her cabin is like a little factory.

‘Well, did thee say that thee was ready for meetin’? I must be gettin’ on.’

‘Thee forgets to remember that I said Judith and I don’t go,’ said David. ‘Judith doesn’t want to. She told me so. She used to go to a church in Lynchburg that had an organ to make music and a preacher in a gown. Thee said it was a gown, Judith?’ David seemed to feel that this astonishing costume needed verification.

Judith flushed faintly and nodded, without any effort at explanation.

‘H’m!’ rumbled Grandfather ominously. ‘Well, I’ll drive in a minute to see Henry and Mary Huff.’

Work in the harvest field had stopped at ten o’clock, though his weather sense warned Henry Huff that there might be rain on the hay before night; each member of the family had been made clean and presentable and now they were almost ready to go to midweek meeting, as they did every Thursday, every week in the year.

Henry Huff stood on the deep inset porch, holding his chin high while his wife arranged his necktie, nor would she allow him to escape to greet Grandfather Halloway until the folds were correctly placed. Grandfather had time to look about him, to see that Dan and Denny were about to

mount their horses, and to invite Daniel to ride with him in a manner that was no more to be refused than a royal command. Daniel was honored. He lent his horse to Mark, who scrambled out of the family carriage and was soon off after Denny, already vanished around a curve in the road.

‘Well, thee looks good enough now to go to meetin’, Henry,’ said Grandfather. ‘How are thee and thine?’

‘I am glad to say,’ Henry Huff returned, an agreeable and imposing figure in his meeting clothes, ‘I am glad to say that David seems well on the road to recovery; and thanks are due to thy granddaughter. I feared — Mary and I feared, once ——’ He broke off and hunted for his handkerchief. What they had feared for David was too dreadful to be mentioned with calm.

‘Thee knows we lost two sons with the fever,’ he went on, presently. ‘The rest of us are hearty and stout enough, but we get uneasy at illness in the family.’

‘H’m-m,’ commented Grandfather more gently; but he proceeded to do his duty. ‘Judith tells me she don’t go to meetin’. I don’t approve of that. And as near as I could figure out, the little boy was knittin’ her sock for her. Now Judith needs trainin’. She’s been brought up in a shiftless way, with rich folks. And I figured Mary Huff would train her better than most.’

Mary Huff came up anxiously. 'Joseph Halloway, I have never been so uncertain what was right to do, as I have with Judith. I didn't know any girl could be so ignorant of housekeeping. She could not cook, nor wash, nor work with the cream and milk, nor even knit, let alone spin and weave. But then, on the other hand, she has a natural gift for nursing, and David did need some one to look after him, for I have neither the time nor the talent.

'I want thee to know I do try to teach her, and she does try to learn. I never let her think but that she must have a great deal of training.

'But take yesterday. I set her to washing clothes in the pounding-barrel, and she kept at it faithful — she won't complain — till the stick raised blisters on her palms and finally took the skin off, and then I saw what had happened. Her hands don't toughen like mine, though I suppose they will in time. So David said he would knit for her — he's a real good knitter; all my boys can rib and turn a heel and toe-off — and I let them walk abroad together. Thee don't know how glad we are to have David out of the weaving-room and into the sunshine, Joseph Halloway!'

'Well, maybe I do, maybe I do,' conceded Grandfather.

'And as for meeting,' Mary Huff went on bravely, 'I feel at fault there, too; but David can't sit still that long yet, and he was more content to

stay with Judith than with any of the rest of us. And I have thought, too, that Judith might see more in our quiet Friends meeting when she was a little longer away from the music and the getting up and down of the church where she used to go with her grandmother. I expect she will be ready to go soon. She has hardly been off the farm since she came.'

'Well, I leave it to thee,' said Grandfather Halloway. 'But see to it thee don't spoil her. She will have to earn her living by hard work like the rest of us.'

'Dan'l, shall we go on? This horse is slower than sorghum.'

'What's thee think of her?' he inquired of the young man, as they moved off together. 'Maybe she is doin' pretty well, considerin' her bringin'-up, hey?'

'I don't know anything about girls,' Dan answered, with more heat than the question might seem to justify. 'We never had any around before; but I should judge that Southern girls were worse brought up than most.'

'She ain't been makin' thee trouble?' Grandfather inquired innocently.

'Oh, no!' Dan had caught himself and spoke with indifference. 'I don't expect anything of her one way or the other. She plays around with David and helps Mother.'

'She's a handsome girl. Takes after her father's people. Our family ain't got looks to brag on.'

'Denny thinks she is.' Dan grinned unsympathetically. 'The day she burnt the corn pone and forgot to salt the potatoes, Denny said it was a shame to scold her and bring tears to her lovely eyes!'

For some reason Grandfather did not enjoy this picture. He kept a frowning silence for some time and then shook his head.

'Well,' he said, 'maybe she won't have to stay with you long. Her mother hates to have her away from home, I know, but I thought it might be good for her to be separated from every one she was used to dependin' on. I discouraged them from visitin' her for that same reason.'

'This Denny, now; is he likely just to keep on livin' here? Ain't he of age? I thought thy father might find him a place in a store or one of the mills. He don't seem to be any great shakes of a farmer.'

'No telling what Denny might do, to hear him,' Dan said. 'Sometimes he is about ready to go back and be a lord in Ireland. But he likes to be comfortable, and he knows he can always get a bed and food here. Father and Mother would never push him out.'

Here Dan paused as if a new idea had struck him, and frowned in his turn.

'I never thought of that before,' he went on,

slowly. 'Denny and Judith —— But I don't believe she thinks much of Denny. I've seen her laugh at him.

'I'll keep an eye on him. Denny never means harm, but he doesn't bother to use judgment. Judith can't cook, and she certainly can rile me; but I'll see she is taken care of. David likes her.'

The subject was now off his mind and he felt free to introduce another that interested him.

'I want to tell thee about my new plan for that cut through the hills,' he began, his thin young face lighting. 'Thee knows thee thought the expense would be too great. Now Father and I think ——'

Grandfather Halloway relaxed, listening closely as the eager voice went on. Slower than sorghum the horse might be, but the way to meeting did not seem too long to either.

Neither knew that Denny had waited, hidden in a side road, until both the carriages were past and then sent his little mare scampering back home. Before the others had reached the meeting-house, the mare was tied to the Huffs' hitching-rack and Denny was searching the paths along the bluff.

At one of the many springs that seeped out along the hillside he spied Judith and David. Judith's skirts were pinned back over her petticoat; her sleeves were rolled up; and she and the little boy were absorbed in walling in the spring from a pile of stones they had gathered up. Denny stopped a

moment to look down on the red head and the tawny one. His first impulse was to startle them with a whistle, but he thought better of that and strolled down the path, clearing his throat gently, bowing when they turned.

‘Don’t mind me, Miss Judith. Leave your skirts out of your way. Davy lad, are you makin’ a fine well? Your family will soon have springs enough to give away to the neighbors.’

‘You can’t give springs away,’ David answered scornfully. ‘Springs have to stay where they grow. Denny, would it be better to carry gravel and spread over the bottom of this spring? There’s nothing but mud in it now.’

‘Don’t ask me,’ Denny returned cheerfully. ‘Your brothers would know better than to expect that kind of knowledge out of me. But I can tell that’s a sweet blue flower leanin’ over and lookin’ at itself in the water. That would be your arrangin’, Miss Judith.’

Judith smiled, well pleased. She had spent much persuasion on David before he had been willing to leave undisturbed the bit of ground where the blue flower-spikes grew. The plant had kept his excavation from being a perfect circle, and he had grumbled about it as he built up the wall.

‘It’s a more beautiful blue than thy suit, David,’ Judith had argued. But David retorted, ‘Not nearly so ’mportant as a good spring.’

Judith had sighed. David was growing up to be like the other energetic, sensible Huffs; she felt extraordinarily useless in the midst of so much solid achievement.

To Denny, who seemed to understand, she said, 'I want to bring down those maidenhair ferns and plant them beside the spring. I like to see them reflected in the water.'

'Why didn't thee go to meeting, Denny?' David demanded.

'Why? Who knows? I haven't decided yet what my best excuse would be. Davy, I know where there is a patch of wild raspberries. I'll bring some for the workers.'

He was back in no time with a double handful of fragrant blackcaps. David forgot to ask more questions. He ate his full share and most of Judith's.

'Are there any more, Denny? I know where thee picked these. Last summer I got enough for Mother to make a pie. Did thee leave any?'

'Bushes full of them! 'Tis a fine yield this year. Run and see!'

David was off at once. Denny propped himself against a great bare root. 'Rest a while, do!' he coaxed Judith. 'I'll dig the ferns soon with me knife and save your fingers. I have a favor to ask of you, Miss Judith, and I hope the grantin' of it will be a pleasure to you. Will you do it?'

'What is it?' Judith asked warily.

'Are you not tired of stayin' at home forever?'

'There's no place to go.'

'I know a place you'd enjoy. There's a play-party across the river at Lacys' to-night. Slip out after the boy is asleep and give me the pleasure of your company.'

'A play-party?'

'That's what they call it. 'Tis much like a dance, but simpler, suited to these farmer-folk. Put on a pretty dress and come, do!'

'I'll ask Aunt Mary.'

Denny shot upright in his alarm. 'Don't do that! They think dancin' is of the Old Fellow! They would forbid your goin' and watch me so close I couldn't either!'

They were interrupted by a wrathful David. 'There were no ripe berries left, Denny. Thee knew it!'

'Did I say the ripe ones were left? Not I! But plenty of green ones there are on the bushes, and they'll be good to eat when they turn, won't they?'

David refused to smile. 'Thee wanted to tease me. What was thee saying to Judith about dancing?'

'Nothing for eavesdroppers.' Denny was out of temper himself. 'I'll be movin' the ferns down, Miss Judith.'

He slashed recklessly around the roots of the

delicate plants with his long knife blade, dug into the crumbling soil with his fingers, and dragged out the clump with the earth falling away from their roots.

‘Where do I stick them in, Miss Judith?’

‘Let me take them,’ Judith said anxiously. ‘I know how to do it. I’ve watched Duberry ever since I was a little girl. Before he moves a plant he pours water over the roots and then the earth sticks to them in a nice ball. Oh, look, that stem is broken!’

Denny said curiously, ‘You watched Duberry?’

‘Yes,’ said Judith, concerned only for the fragile ferns. ‘He is a good gardener. Grandmother trained him herself — Oh!’

She woke to what she was saying. David had not understood, but Denny was all knowing smiles.

‘I didn’t mean to tell that. It’s a secret! Oh, Denny, please don’t tell any one! The Huffs would not like it.’

‘Surely not!’ Denny answered blandly, but while Judith finished her planting and washed her hands he sat on the hillside making strange sounds of suppressed amusement. At last he laughed aloud and slapped his knee.

‘That secret ought to be worth somethin’,’ he congratulated himself. ‘Miss Judith, you’ll have to pay me by grantin’ my favor!’

‘But, Denny, I ought not to go, if ——’

‘What does thee want Judith to do?’ David broke in. ‘Oh, I know, I know!’

‘The Lacys told Joseph John that they were going to have a party. Joseph John doesn’t want to go, but Tommy does; if he only dared, Tommy said, he would go and watch. I want to go, Denny. Take me!’

‘And why should I?’ Denny asked.

‘Because I’ll tell Father on thee, if thee doesn’t! I want to see a play-party just once. Judith, make Denny take me!’

Denny’s eyes were beginning to twinkle. ‘Very well, I’ll take the two of you. It’ll be a great joke on your father. Miss Judith, is it a bargain?’

‘David couldn’t walk so far.’

‘If that’s all, I’ll carry him piggy-back myself.’

‘Please, Judith!’ David slipped his warm little hand into hers. ‘We can wait till they think we are asleep and no one will ever know.’

‘Maybe,’ Denny suggested, ‘you think dancing is wrong, Miss Judith? I will not press you if you do.’

‘I love to dance,’ Judith answered honestly. ‘No, I don’t think it is wrong. But the Huffs ——’

‘Miss Judith,’ said Denny with an air of great worldly wisdom, ‘I’ve found it hard enough to live up to me own principles, without tryin’ to live up to the principles of other people. That is, unless they can make trouble for you! This time no one

will find out and no one will be hurt. Come and give the three of us a pleasant evenin'!

There was a convincing ring to this argument. In the back of Judith's mind was the delightful memory of a ball to which she had gone the winter before, in great state, with Grandmother Lankester. It was a quite grown-up dance, with two fiddlers, ladies in elaborate evening-gowns made the new way over crinolines, and formal, bowing gentlemen. One of these latter, well known to Grandmother, had been permitted to lead Judith through a dance. If she could feel again the smooth floor under her dancing slippers, even in this wilderness, it might seem again like those remote and beautiful old times.

'We couldn't cross on the bridge,' she demurred. 'Dan will be working there again to-night.'

'Bless your heart for a darling! You'll go then! The bridge is no hindrance. I'll have me little bateau ready under the big sycamore yonder to carry you over. There's a little path goes down the side of the cornfield direct to it, maybe you know? I'll be waitin' for you there after dark; for David and all.'

'I'll wear my blue suit,' David said blissfully. 'Come on up to the house, Judith, I'm hungry!'

'And I've forgotten to put the meat on or peel the potatoes,' Judith remembered sadly. 'What time can it be?'

David squinted a professional eye at the sun. 'It's after noon, Judith. Come help us with the dinner, Denny, or it won't be ready when the folks come home.'

Denny patted the little boy's head. 'Take your time at peelin' the potatoes, for all of me, Davy. What do I care about dinner? I'm thinkin' about to-night!'

CHAPTER VII

THE PLAY-PARTY

THE sun went down behind tumbled clouds flushed with gorgeous, angry colors; as soon as it was dark heat lightning played constantly around their edges and sometimes flashed in great sheets across half the sky; but there was no thunder and no wind, so that the night seemed strangely quiet.

Henry Huff and his boys had worked late getting the hay into the mows, but since the rain still held off they went about their evening chores more leisurely. Dan went off to the river earlier than usual to work on his bridge. The supporting pen on the sand bar was not yet completely filled with the stones that were to hold it in case the river rose, and he was impatient to see it done. Through the red sunset light he carried boulders across the double log footing, and when the sun was gone he continued, more slowly but steadily, through the alternate darkness and lightning glare.

Denny, left to milk Dan's share of the cows, as well as his own, was in a fever of impatience. He brought in not more than two thirds of the usual amount of milk, which he strained himself at the spring-house rather than invite comment by putting the chore off on Robert Barclay.

His bottle-green coat with the long tails and his striped waistcoat he had taken care to secrete that noon behind the big 'gum' in the barn, and as soon as the barn was empty he dressed himself there, not forgetting to anoint his hair with the perfumed oil which he found so difficult to hide from the inquisitive noses of the twins.

The windows of the house were dark when he stepped outside the barn door, and satisfied that none of the tired household would stay awake to wonder where he was, he made off eagerly down the bluff and along the cornfield path. He was dressed for a party, he had a pretty girl to take with him, and he felt himself a person of importance.

'None of them red-headed Huffs could look so fine as I do, even if they had the taste for clothes,' he assured himself.

'Neither would they spend the money to look like gentlemen. There was Mister Huff wantin' me to save my calf money, instead of buyin' this coat. He spoke as if he had the right to tell me so, havin' given me the calf. Did I not have the tr-rouble of bringin' up the miserable little wretch, stickin' its nose in a pail of milk twice a day, to have it always blow a fountain of milk at me? Ugh! Surely I had a right to buy a good coat with what few dollars came from its meat and hide. But to this day Mister Huff casts a queer eye at the coat.

'He, the poor thing, knows no better than to save

his money for his railroad schemes. I wonder, does he keep it all in that little iron box? Some day I will find out. It would teach him a lesson if I should break open the padlock to the box — with him never even lockin' the door at night. A body might take anything these Quakers have. Have I not taken the girl and his boy to-night from under his nose?'

He slapped his thigh gleefully as he hurried on, but the feel of the rough homespun under his palm sobered somewhat his high mood.

'Could I help it if I could not afford to buy grand breeches, too?' he argued. 'Or that the tailor would not trust me for the money till Mister Huff might give me another calf? Besides, I would get them splashed with the river water or the mud of the road.'

He had come now to the great white trunk of the sycamore tree, gleaming on the river bank like a monument whenever the lightning shone forth.

'Are you there?' he asked softly. As he came by he had listened at the corner of the weaving-cabin long enough to decide that it was already empty.

'We've been waiting a long time,' David answered crossly. 'I wanted to take the boat and go over without thee.'

'Sh-h!' Judith warned. 'Not so loud, David! Dan is up at the bridge. Hear him?'

Denny heard an armload of rocks clatter into

place and when the sky was next lit he looked upstream.

‘Maybe ’twould be well to drift downstream close to the bank before we cross,’ he decided. ‘Then he could not see us and maybe try to spoil our party. Davy, climb down into the bateau. Miss Judith, may I help you?’

Judith arranged herself as well as she could in the narrow stern seat beside David. Her tarlatan skirts would have to be crushed, but she tried to hold her thin slippers out of the shallow puddle of water that raced back and forth in the flat-bottomed boat, not in the least troubling Denny.

Denny rowed well. The boat slipped softly downstream along the bank. When they reached a bend in the river-course he took them quickly across and beached the craft on the gravelly shore.

‘Here is a little path where the Lacys come down to fish. The house is just beyond through the woods.’

It was a path with which he was familiar, but Judith and David climbed the bluff and followed through the woods with difficulty.

‘See the light yonder?’ Denny cheered them. ‘That is the Lacys.’

‘I can’t see anything except lightning and then dark,’ complained David. ‘And my legs are tired in my knees. Is it going to rain, Judith?’

‘Oh, no,’ Denny answered easily. ‘This is heat lightning. It never brings rain.’

They came at last to a gap in a rail fence, past a pen where a startled hog rose and snorted in the dark, across a barn lot littered with corncobs that turned under their feet, and then around a low building whose open doors and one small window showed it candlelit inside.

A great chatter of voices rose from within, and all around the clearing were saddle horses, tied to the lower branches of the trees.

At this point David's courage failed. He hung back on Judith's hand and whispered in a panic, 'I don't want to go in! I don't want to go in!'

'What is the matter?' Denny demanded.

'I don't want to go in,' David repeated, tears in his voice. 'I'm afraid. I want to go home with Judith.'

'Well, and what are you afraid of?' Denny scolded. 'No one will hurt you. They will not even notice a little boy like you.'

'Yes, they will,' David insisted. 'And they will tell Father!'

'Mister Huff could do no more than kill you,' Denny answered with impatient disgust. Then a happy idea occurred to him. 'Look, boy! See the little tree by the window with a crotch just right for you to sit there and watch within? Stay here out of sight and rest, and I can come out to see you once in a while. I'll give you a boost.'

David was willing to accept this plan; with re-



DAVID SETTLED HIMSELF IN HIS PERCH AND DENNY OFFERED
HIS ARM TO JUDITH

vived spirits he settled himself in his perch, and Denny offered his arm to Judith.

‘Shall we go in?’

In her turn Judith drew back. ‘Suppose the Huffs *were* to hear that I had come to this?’

‘Why are the two of you so scared and unreasonable? The Huffs will never know. None of these here have ever seen your pretty face.’

Reluctantly Judith let herself be led on to the door. They had to make their way through a noisy crowd who paid little attention to the newcomers, so occupied they were with high-voiced jokes and mock scuffles; but when Judith stepped inside the door and stood there an instant uncertainly, a silence fell, broken at first only by embarrassed whisperings.

Here was no spacious ballroom with waxed floors and paneled walls. This was a one-roomed log-cabin that differed from the weaving-room only in being twice as large. A bed dressed in a gay quilt stood in one corner. The rest of the scanty furniture had been pushed back against the wall out of the way.

The fresh-faced girls were dressed in calico; some of the men, like Denny, might boast of a coat of factory cloth, or a white shirt, but their pantaloons were of homespun and their shoes were shapeless and heavy.

For their part they saw in the doorway a strange

girl whose shining, tawny hair encircled her head in a coronet braid; whose pale yellow dress was trimmed with lover's knots of satin ribbon, and whose muddy little slippers were also of satin.

It would have been hard to tell which was more ill at ease. Judith recognized no one, nor did any one advance to welcome her; but Denny was at once in his element.

'Good-evenin', Mistress Lacy! Good-evenin', Mister Lacy, sir! I was sorry to be detained.'

'Old Man Huff keep you?' inquired the man addressed, lounging on a bench and steadily chewing.

Denny looked roguish. 'That would be tellin'. But I brought a fine partner, so you will forgive me, sir.'

'Oh, I guess they could have managed to git on without you,' the man answered. 'Young Haydock can lead about as well as you, Denny. Can the gal play? These town gals knows the minnyet and that sort, but a good play-party they's too fine fer. My old woman kin beat any of 'em.'

'My girl can dance.' Denny was unquenched. 'Let's start somethin'. Here, you, come indoors! Send old Grandma down to town!'

Judith moved hastily to one side, to watch awhile before dancing, but she found herself being hustled into a long line of girls, by a partner who did not ask her permission, but ranged himself opposite her and winked at Denny's discomfiture.

Denny was a born master of the dance. By his zeal in seeing that the lines were formed he had lost Judith's company; now he led giggling Mrs. Lacy to the head of the line and struck up a song in which all joined:

'Send old Grandma down to town,
Send old Grandma down to town,
Send old Grandma down to town,
You're the one, my darling!'

Judith found this an accompaniment to a vigorous variation of the Virginia reel. Sometimes the words of the song indicated what figure might be expected and sometimes they did not. Without warning Judith was seized and whirled off her feet by her muscular partner and set down breathless in her place. This was the accepted method of swinging partners; only when Denny came singing down the line did he lift her hand and circle daintily round her to the amusement of the others; and the next man down took particular pains to swing the girl with all his strength. Judith did not like it, but no offense was intended and she could take none.

Without a breathing space they formed a circle at Denny's buoyant command for Captain Jinks. Judith found her former partner beside her, smiling down at Denny, who came to protest.

'I'll dance with my own girl this time, Haydock.'

'You have trouble enough ordering us all around,

little Denny,' the other answered. 'Git along. My pardner suits me.'

Denny eyed Haydock's height and his hard brown hands, and retreated diplomatically, though with a scowl, to strike up:

'I'm Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,
I feed my horse on corn and beans,
And often go beyond my means,
I'm Captain Jinks of the Army!'

When the last verse was played through he was at Judith's side.

'I have a new one to try to-night. It takes only four. Will you play opposite me?'

'I'm too tired,' Judith pleaded.

'Ah, now!' Denny coaxed, while the tall Haydock grinned.

'No!' Judith returned decidedly.

She escaped through the not too friendly crowd and hurried around the cabin. David clutched her shoulder.

'Stay with me, Judith. Why didn't thee come sooner? Can thee see through the window? Denny has two girls and another boy and they have hold of hands. Aren't they funny?'

Through the window came a romping song whose words, often repeated, reminded Judith of something she knew already, though what it was she could not think.

‘Molly Brooks has gone to the isle,
Gone to the isle,
Gone to the isle,
Molly Brooks has gone to the isle,
And I hope she never returns!’

‘Change hands and reverse!’ came Denny’s voice.

‘And I hope she never returns,
I hope she never returns,
Molly Brooks has gone to the isle,
And I hope she never returns!’

‘It sounds like that French song thee sings; the soldier named Molly Brooks,’ David commented interestedly.

‘His name was Malbrough,’ Judith corrected. ‘But thee’s right — Molly Brooks — Malbrough. And the tune is something like. I wonder how it got out here, and how it was so changed. Things aren’t the same here,’ she said sadly, thinking of the kind of dance she had expected to find to-night.

‘Judith, I hear thunder. It’s going to rain!’ David stared off fearfully into the east where the distant thunder continued to roll. A gust of wind passed swiftly by, gratefully cool, but promising rain even more surely than the thunder.

‘Let’s go home!’ David was already scrambling down from his perch.

‘Stay here,’ said Judith, wishing her evening

were already well over. 'Stay here and I'll ask Denny to take us.'

Denny, inside, was wiping his hot forehead.

'It went fine, Miss Judith. Come on. We'll play somethin' easier.'

'It's going to rain, Denny; we must take David home.'

'I will not, then,' said Denny flatly. 'The little wretch, to spoil our evenin's sport! Let him come in here under shelter, if it should rain, which it won't!'

'I want to go, too, Denny.'

'Nonsense! You let the small boy work on your tender feelin's!' Denny stuffed his handkerchief back into his pocket and paid no more attention to the girl's remonstrances. 'Form a circle for Skip-to-my-Lou!' he called.

He seized Judith's hand and the hand of the girl nearest to him on the other side. 'Take your partners! Haydock, man, lead out and show us what you can do!'

'Cats in the cream-jar, two by two,
Cats in the cream-jar, two by two,
Cats in the cream-jar, two by two,
Skip-to-my-Lou, my darling!'

Chin in air, Haydock pranced over from the center of the circle to Judith, swung her till her skirts whirled wide, and, setting her down, took Denny's place with a grin.

In his turn Denny stepped round the circle, chose another girl, and the game went on.

'I'll get another one, prettier, too,
I'll get another one, prettier, too,
I'll get another one, prettier, too,
Skip-to-my-Lou, my darling!'

Judith stood in her place, troubled, not knowing how to escape, while the game went on through a dozen rollicking verses. Presently Denny's partner was swung away from him again and with a beaming smile he crossed the floor directly to Judith.

'Chickens in the truck-patch, shoo-shoo-shoo!
Chickens in the truck-patch, shoo-shoo-shoo ——

He was about to claim Judith when Haydock, beside her, put a long arm about Judith's waist, swung her away from the surprised and discomfited Denny and set her down a little back of the circle. In the giggling that broke through the song, Denny hesitated. He knew that Haydock might do this as part of the game, but he recognized insult in his manner.

'Punch his nose,' Mr. Lacy advised, and others cheered the suggestion, but Denny chose to turn his back and advance to another girl who accepted him scornfully.

Young Haydock had placed himself almost in front of Judith. With an angry glance at his unconscious back, Judith slipped out of the door and

ran around the cabin. The wind came steadily now; the thunder rumbled nearer, and David, believing himself forsaken, was crying, with his arms around the trunk of the little tree.

‘Never mind, David. We won’t wait for Denny. We’ll go home right away.’

‘Does thee know the path to the boat?’

‘No, but I can’t row a boat, so it doesn’t matter. We’ll cut across the corner of this woods to the road. It can’t be far.’

‘Dan will see us when we cross the bridge.’

‘Dan won’t stay out so late. Hurry!’

The game inside the cabin had broken up in confusion. ‘Where’s your gal, Haydock?’ some one jeered. ‘Give you the slip?’

‘Come on,’ Judith said urgently. ‘Take my hand!’

She gathered up her skirts and ran across the cleared space to the thicket bordering the woods. David ran with her, but he looked back over his shoulder and, in consequence, stumbled and fell. Before Judith had him again on his feet, young Haydock, sauntering away from the teasing, had caught the pale flutter of her dress, and strode over.

Judith stepped in front of David until she could dismiss the young man.

‘Hey there,’ he greeted her. ‘What d’ y’ want to run away fer? Come back in.’ He put his big hand

under her elbow. 'They're goin' to cut the cakes now, and Old Man Lacy has some prime cider. I've had some of it already.'

'I'm going home,' Judith said.

'Home? Where d' y' live?'

'I don't live far,' said Judith. 'Please take your hand away.'

He did not move. 'Who are you, anyway?' he asked curiously. 'Where did Denny pick you up? The Huffs don't have no girls.'

'It is of no importance to you,' answered Judith.

'Oh — ain't it? If you're goin' to be so high and mighty I'll make it of importance. You wait here while I get my horse, and I'll take you home and find out where Denny's girl lives.'

A broad flash of lightning showed Judith the malicious, confident grin on his face; to Haydock it showed something crouching in the wind-blown bushes.

'What y' got there behind y'?'

'Go away!' Judith commanded furiously. 'Let me alone!' But she knew that the situation was getting past her control.

For answer young Haydock reached past her with one long arm and hauled up David from his hiding-place, too frightened for outcry.

'Well, now, what's this here?' He turned David around for inspection. 'What is this little tad doin'?

'You're a funny gal,' he told Judith. 'I d' know why you want t' hide the little feller. But see here! Let me take y' home and I won't tell nobody.'

Judith kept angry silence.

'You wait!' he commanded, and went off after his horse.

As soon as his back was turned, Judith caught up David. Carefully at first, so as to make little noise, she penetrated into the deep shadow of the thicket bordering the near-by woods, and then more recklessly, as Haydock was out of hearing. Here was no path. She sheltered David as well as she could from the low limbs and tearing briars and let her dress go. The thin fabric caught continually but tore free almost as fast. She had succeeded in struggling through the thicket to the deeper woods with less underbrush before she heard Haydock again.

For a frozen instant she stood still, hearing him break easily through the bushes that had held her back. Then she held David closer and ran on, this way and that, as the trees opened a passage for her, or a fallen log blocked the way.

'I hear ye!' laughed her pursuer. 'Don't be a fool! Don't y' know it's goin' to rain?'

Judith ran the harder. Haydock's footsteps sounded nearer on the dry leaves. The alternated lightning flash and blinding dark troubled him more than the girl, for he was trying to catch a glimpse of her, while Judith's only concern was to get away in

whatever direction she could; but she was certain that he was gaining on her, and that she could not go on much longer, breathless under the weight of the little boy.

What she should do when Haydock caught up with her, as it seemed he must, she could not think. It might have been better, in that case, to have accepted the ride with this rough fellow and the humiliation of herself and David before the Huffs; but before she had any plan to meet the emergency her race was at an end. Her foot struck a root and she fell heavily without even time to release David.

‘Quiet!’ she gasped to David, who was bravely silent.

The ground under her had a curious crumbling texture, she recognized as she tried to rise, and as she pulled herself to her feet she encountered a rough wall that filled her hair with dry, crumbling stuff. The next lightning flash showed the slit through which they had fallen into the hollow of a great dead tree still standing where it had grown these thousand years.

David recognized as quickly as Judith the kind of shelter they had chanced upon; while the girl flattened herself against the inner wall of the tree close to its opening David crouched beside her, fairly secure against discovery in his dark suit. They heard their hunter charge on past, and pre-

sently they heard him retrace his steps, muttering to himself.

‘The little fool! The little fool! Mebby she got away to the road. I’ll git the mare and catch up with her. She’ll be glad enough to see me when the storm comes on!’

The two in the hollow tree waited until there was no more sound of him before they moved or spoke, and by that time the first drops of the coming rain were pattering distinctly on the forest roof.

‘Let’s stay here, Judith,’ David whispered. ‘I think this is the tree where Denny sleeps when he runs away. His tree is better than a house, he says.’

‘Oh, no! We must go home as fast as we can!’

‘Which way *is* home?’

Judith fought to suppress a rising panic. She did not know where she was nor how she had come there. In this dark forest one direction was like another. The lightning had left the east and spread over the whole sky, but it might be that the wind was still from the east, and eastward of them was the road. Heads bent, the two moved forward into the wind and the rain.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE BRIDGE

DAN had almost finished carrying boulders when the wind and thunder told him plainly that rain was near.

‘Two more big loads,’ he said to himself, as he hurried, ‘and she’ll stand any raise in the river that’s likely to come this summer. Once I get this off my mind I’ll survey for that railroad cut again. Seemed to me this morning that Joseph Halloway was about interested enough to subscribe for some stock.

‘See here, kitty, it’s time for cats to get home. We’re going to have a regular gully-washer!’

Sir Thomas, thus addressed, merely removed himself from Dan’s path, lashing his tail restlessly. His behavior that evening had been most unusual. Regardless of his usual comfortable routine he had appeared at the river bank an hour before and had since prowled up and down, rubbing against Dan’s legs, leaping up on the foot-logs, but oftener disappearing into the tall horseweeds, sniffing as he went.

‘Go back home,’ Daniel advised again. ‘Thee likes to sleep on David’s bed and he likes to have thee there. Trot along! Thee can open his door as well as I can.’

He dropped the last big stone, turned it until it fitted down among the others more securely, and stood erect to draw a great breath.

‘She’s done!’ he announced exultantly to the world. ‘She’s done!’

In a broad flash of lightning he saw the full length of the bridge and all its well-planned details.

‘Hardwood logs for the pens, full of stones from the second bottom — twenty sledge-loads of them! A good double footing of yellow poplar logs; and didn’t we have a time getting them in place! I couldn’t have managed that without Father, but now they’re braced and spiked and solid as any of it. That bridge will stand!’

‘Now, pussy, we’ll see if we can build a railroad!’

He stooped to gather up Sir Thomas to carry him home, but the cat escaped his hands. In spite of the rain that was already upon them, he seemed stubbornly set on staying by the bridge. Dan was still trying to collect him from the middle pen when he was hailed from the farther bank.

‘Hey there!’

‘Who is it?’ Dan answered.

‘Haydock. Jot Haydock. Has a girl been along here?’

‘A girl?’ Dan stiffened. He knew of Haydock as a man a few years older than himself with no settled occupation. In winter he trapped for fur and occasionally he hired out to clear land or split

rails, but for the most part he idled around his mother's little cabin well out on the other side of town. For such ne'er-do-wells Dan felt only contempt.

'There's been no girl along here. Why should there be?'

The man chuckled. 'This was Denny's girl. I offered to see her home, but she give me the slip. Now I'm patrollin' the road to see cain't I ketch up with her, a bad night like this.'

'Maybe she'd prefer the rain,' Dan suggested.

Haydock laughed. 'Shucks, you don't know the girls! Give this one a hug for me if she comes along.' He wheeled his horse and laid on the whip leaving Dan staring into the darkness after him.

Denny was evidently up to mischief, and Dan could guess where he was to be found.

'Sneaked off to the Lacys. He knows Father doesn't approve. It's not so much the games; it's the rough crowd that goes there, and the drinking. Hard cider and sugar-water beer, and Denny says that they have whiskey. He ought not to have gone.

'Like as not Haydock will pick a fight with him over this girl, whoever she is. I'd better wait here a while and see if he comes this way. Maybe I can straighten him out and save the folks some worry.'

He sat down at the end of the bridge, kicking one heel against the logs as he grew angrier thinking of Denny's conduct.

‘He has no gratitude. Father and Mother took him in when he was ragged and sick and hadn’t a penny nor a friend in the world; but he never thinks of their wishes.’

Against his wet hand he felt Sir Thomas’s exploring whiskers.

‘Have sense,’ Dan remarked to him sternly. ‘Go home!’ But Sir Thomas was unabashed. He compressed himself into small space to the lee of the young man and Dan relented enough to shift and afford the cat more shelter. He was himself so drenched that he could feel little streams running down his back.

‘I don’t know why thee honors me with thy company, kitty,’ he said, ‘but I suppose I should appreciate the compliment. Denny won’t care much for mine.’

A rustle and stir in the weeds to his right caught his attention, but to his astonishment it was a child’s voice that piped,

‘It’s Dan! I know it is! I heard him! Dan will take us home. Dan, thee won’t tell Father?’

Running and stumbling, the little boy reached the bridge. Mechanically Dan helped him to scramble up and lifted him to his shoulder where David clung, soaked and muddy.

‘David, how did thee get here?’

‘Judith brought me. There she is.’

‘*Judith?*’

‘Yes.’ Judith’s weary voice came up. ‘We thought you would be home after the rain started; but we should have had to cross at the bridge anyway. I can’t row a boat.’

‘Can’t row a boat?’ Dan repeated in complete bewilderment. He put out a hand to help the girl up.

‘No. And David and I didn’t know where it was safe to ford the river. So we had to come to the bridge.’ Judith shivered.

‘Why did you have to cross the river? Where have you been?’

Neither answered.

‘I know, I suppose,’ Dan said slowly. ‘Denny took you to the Lacys. Judith was the girl that Jot Haydock spoke about.’

‘Yes,’ said Judith, ‘I suppose I was.’

‘Did you say that man *spoke* to you about me?’ she asked with a start of realization. ‘He isn’t here?’

‘No, he’s not here. You must both get on home as fast as you can,’ Dan said harshly. ‘David will be sick again.’

‘Dan, will thee tell Father? Please don’t tell Father!’ David pleaded.

‘I won’t,’ Dan answered shortly. ‘Not because you don’t deserve it, but because it would worry Father and Mother. Come on, Judith.’

Judith said, ‘I’m sorry, Dan. The lightning

makes me dizzy. I can't cross the bridge by myself.'

Without a word Dan put his left hand back to her and the three crossed over, slowly and awkwardly.

So long as he was to have no punishment, David cared not at all how much he deserved. Safely on the road home, riding securely on Dan's strong shoulder, his spirits rose.

'We were afraid of that man that said he would bring us home, weren't we, Judith? He chased us and we ran and hid, and when he went away we were lost, weren't we? We thought we knew where the road was, but when we got there it was the river instead. So we came up the river.

'Judith can't row a boat,' David explained patronizingly, 'so we had to follow the path. Sometimes it was horseweed, higher'n our heads. Sometimes the path went so close to the river that Judith stepped in. But she was so wet already it didn't matter. I grabbed some leaves off a plant that tickled my hand. I think maybe it's boneset.'

'If Denny took you, why didn't he bring you home decently?' asked Dan, trying to find some reason in this wild performance.

'The party wasn't over,' David answered. 'Judith asked him to bring us before the rain, but Denny wouldn't leave.'

They were climbing now the hill that approached the house. Dan moved over to the roadside grass to avoid the sound of gravel under his boots.

‘Better follow me,’ he advised Judith. ‘Less noise.’

‘I won’t make any noise,’ Judith answered patiently. ‘I lost my slippers in the mud coming up the river.’

Dan made no reply. He led them in a wide arc around to the door of the weaving-cabin, where he lifted the latch softly and let them in out of the pouring rain. Stirring in the ashes on the hearth he turned up a few coals and from them deftly built up a little fire.

By the time the fire blazed steadily Judith had David out of his wet clothes and into his night-gown, and while Dan hung the clothes on a chair before the fire Judith wrapped in a cloth the warm stone that always stood on the hearth, ready for cold feet, and tucked it into David’s bed.

David pulled up under his chin the satin cloak that was still his bedtime joy and felt the warm stone with his toes.

‘I ’spect it’s after ten o’clock,’ he said with great content. ‘I was never up so late before. There’s the cat!’

Sir Thomas sat in the firelight and licked his wet fur and muddy paws with concentrated care, leaving Judith to close the door he had unlatched to enter. David gave a great yawn, rolled over, and was asleep almost at once.

Daniel mended the fire and then regarded Judith

frowningly. The forest branches had long before torn down the thick braid that circled her head, and raveled it out into its separate strands. Now her hair hung loose down her back, dripping and tangled with twigs. Her yellow dress with the lover's knots was a muddy rag; it hid her feet, but on her arms was a criss-cross of briar-marks and one long scratch, still bleeding.

'I'm sorry,' Judith said humbly. 'I ought not to have gone. I would tell your father and mother and let them send me away if it would do any good.'

'They won't have to know unless David gets sick again,' Dan answered grudgingly.

'I carried him most of the way.' There were anxious tears in Judith's eyes. 'I hope he won't be sick.'

'Thee carried him?' Dan looked incredulous.

'He was tired,' Judith said, 'and it was hard going.'

'Thee get warm and go to bed,' Daniel commanded. 'Is there water for washing? I'll fill a bucket at the spring.'

Presently he set the wooden bucket inside the door. 'One thing more,' he said to Judith, crouching before the fire wrapped in a blanket. 'Did Denny take you across in his boat?'

'Below the bend,' Judith answered, trying to control her shivering. 'Dan —— it wasn't all his

fault. I wanted to go. I thought it would be like a Virginia ball. It wasn't!'

'I should judge not,' Dan replied gravely, but there was a passing twinkle in his eye. He shut the door softly and was gone.

Once cautiously away from the house, he ran down the roadside to the bridge, crossed it and took the foot path that wandered down the other side of the river, avoiding tree trunks and dodging grape vines that slapped his face. He knew where he was going and in spite of obstacles in the dark he felt his way to the spot where the boat was beached. In ten minutes he had rowed back upstream and tied up the boat to the bridge support, and there he sat to wait in the downpour, too angry to feel chilled.

Denny was not in a pleasant frame of mind as he followed the river path half an hour later; indeed, he felt distinctly abused. Jot Haydock had returned to the party and let it be understood that he had seen Denny's mysterious girl home, and thereafter Denny had been the object of much loud teasing, increasing his own chagrin that Judith had deserted him for no reason but David's whim. Denny would have escaped at once if it had not been for the rain; and when it did not slacken and the jokes grew rougher he flung out of the cabin, and let the tempest do its worst for the green coat.

Then, when he had come to the river no boat was

there. He took the path to the bridge only after much useless exploring of the near-by shores, mourning his loss. Much of his boyhood had been spent along rivers, and he understood boats. A boat for his own use meant a certain independence to him, much as a horse might mean to another man.

‘Tis not like me to tie a boat so it can slip away,’ he said to himself. ‘Maybe I was in too much of a hurry. Or maybe that Haydock came by and cut the rope for spite.’

He recalled lovingly what a good little boat it was, stable on its flat bottom, and not leaking much even after a winter’s storage.

‘After all the work I had done on it!’ he complained, almost persuading his lively imagination that he had built it from the framework up, though it was actually the sturdy handiwork of Dan and Joseph John some three years before, and Denny had done little more than claim it for his own and see that the Huffs kept it in repair.

‘Maybe ’twill lodge against the bank somewhere if it has floated off. In the mornin’ I’ll go look at the fallen tree where I fish. Maybe I’ll take a little ja’nt of two or three days before I return.’

It was with a feeling that the tide of ill luck had turned that he saw in one of the lessening lightning flashes the boat secured at the bridge.

‘Now I wonder, how did it get there? Well, it’s no matter, if it is safe. Maybe I should take it

across the river and turn it bottom side up so it will not fill with rain in this storm.'

As he bent over the boat, to his astonishment and terror a determined hand reached down through the darkness above him, and lifted him through the air.

'Who —— who ——?' he stuttered. 'Haydock, is that you?'

Dan laughed unpleasantly. 'Not this time.' He stood Denny up on the bridge before him, towering well above him.

'Thee's a disgrace to the family,' Dan told him. 'I'm going to teach thee a lesson, so thee will remember to take better care of women and children next time.'

'It was not my fault,' Denny protested quickly, confident of the truth of his statement and ruffled at being so unceremoniously treated. He slipped on the wet log and clung quickly to Dan until he had caught his balance once more.

'Don't be crazy, Dan,' he went on more confidently. 'Could I help it if she ran away from me? Though how you found out I do not know! Let's be goin' home. I'm soaked through me good coat.'

'Thee'll be wetter before I'm through,' Dan informed him grimly. 'I hope it may teach thee something.'

Before Denny could resist he was whirled around, lifted off his feet and swung outward into the dark-

ness with all Dan's strength. A splash, a struggle in the water, and much sputtering told of Denny's encounter with the river. He set out for shore, instinctively trying to swim, as soon as he had caught a breath, but swimming was not easy in those tight coat sleeves.

'I'm drowning!' he called piteously. 'I can't swim!'

'Walk, then,' advised Dan. 'It's not more than thigh deep anywhere along there and thee knows it!'

At this practical suggestion he heard Denny flounder upright and slowly plow out through the water to the other bank. Dan walked along the foot-logs above him, stopping at the end.

'I want thee to understand,' he said sternly, 'that thee lets Judith alone after this. Thee can't take proper care of her. And if I hear of thy getting into mischief like this I'll duck thee again!'

For answer Denny swarmed up the pen of rocks, above which Dan was standing. He came clumsily, because with one hand he was feeling in his pocket for his long-bladed knife, and because he was shaking with rage, so that it was hard either to find the knife or to climb.

'Don't come up here,' Dan warned him. 'Go home and get in without disturbing the family.'

Denny came on. As Dan bent over to enforce his order, Denny's free hand found the other's heavy leather boot and grasped his ankle. It was

easy to Dan to collar the boy, but he was not quick enough to prevent Denny, sobbing with anger, from driving his knife into Dan's foot.

The moment after, Dan had seized his wrist and tightened his grip until Denny's powerless fingers released the knife. Then, carrying Denny like a dangling kitten by his collar, he walked out deliberately to the middle of the river and dropped him in again.

Denny came to his feet more quickly this time. He stood there for a while in the darkness, breathing hard, and then he turned and slowly dragged himself through the river to the shore.

Dan listened to him, going off down the river bank through the weeds, and was undecided what he ought to do. There was something so childlike about Denny that when he was most exasperating he seemed to need to be protected from his own impulses, rather than punished for their bad consequences. A man who would be so careless of a young girl and a little boy deserved severe punishment. The trouble was that Denny would never be grown-up, though he wished to enjoy a man's privileges.

In spite of his just indignation and the sting in his foot, Dan felt unwillingly sorry for Denny, his pride broken, going off miserably through the wet.

It was hardly fair to Denny, Dan reflected, limping homeward, that he should have to be held up to

the standards of the Huffs. Denny had hardly been brought up at all; until he came to the Huffs he had never been taught the satisfaction of living within his means; had never known the pleasures of making horse-shoes and boats and bridges with his own hands, or of being in general a good responsible citizen. Even while he was examining the cut in his foot he resolved to undertake Denny's education more seriously.

He did not want to wake any one in the crowded house by lighting a candle. The leather in his boot showed an inch cut, but the wound, though it might be fairly deep, did not seem to be bleeding excessively. He washed it and tied a handkerchief about it.

So long as he was awake he listened for Denny's return, but he was very tired and soon slept, drowsily hoping that Denny had not run amuck in his cornfield, which the rain was bringing to perfection.

Out in the loft of the weaving-cabin Judith dreamed and woke and returned again to troubled dreams so vivid that they gave her scant rest. When a voice wailing her name came up to her window she thought at first that it came from a dream and tried to relax to sounder sleep. In spite of her efforts it persisted. 'Miss Judith! Judith! Come down!'

When Judith finally sat up, convinced that she was awake, the voice had become recklessly louder

and she knew it for Denny's. She pulled on her work dress, came down the ladder to the lower room where David slumbered undisturbed, and went over to the far window that gave light to the loom.

'Be quiet, Denny,' she commanded urgently. 'Do you want the whole family out here? What are you after?'

'Come out, Miss Judith. I must see you.'

'In this rain? Denny, go in and go to sleep.'

'Miss Judith, I can never stay here another night; and I know that you will never be happy here either. Come with me! We'll float down the river in the little bateau till we reach the Ohio, and there we'll turn and work our way over to Virginia. I know the road well. Leave this unhappy spot!'

Judith felt as if she were slipping back into a wild dream.

'Denny,' she beseeched desperately, 'have some sense! You and I don't belong here, but we can't possibly leave. And do you think that I would trust you to carry me back home, when you couldn't even take care of David and me to-night?'

For a moment the only sound was the dripping of water from the eaves; then Judith heard the squash of Denny's footsteps as he withdrew from the window.

'You throw my misfortune up to me, too, do you? Then I'll go by myself. And you'll be sorry, Miss Judith!'

CHAPTER IX

THE FLOOD

DAVID was still sleeping when Judith came down in the morning. To her heavy eyes the little cabin appeared strangely undisturbed. Only the little blue suit drying before the fireplace looked out of order. Judith hung it on a peg where it would attract less attention; she stirred the ashes and a scrap of scorched ribbon lifted away from them. This she pressed down on a live ember until a little flame wavered across it, completing the destruction of her yellow gown whose rags she had stuffed on the fire the night before.

‘David!’ she said then, ‘David! It’s time to get up.’

David half lifted reluctant eyelids.

‘Bring me my breakfast, Judith; I want to sleep some more.’

‘No,’ said Judith. ‘We’re going to eat in the big house.’

On consideration, David rather liked this idea. ‘They’ll be surprised,’ he said, and sat up and stretched.

His mouth drooped when Judith brought him a little shirt and trousers of linen. ‘I wanted to wear my blue suit.’

‘We are going to work to-day. It is time we made ourselves useful. And remember, David, we aren’t going to talk about last night even to each other.’

With a surprised glance at Judith’s pale, serious face, David dressed himself and trotted over to the kitchen for breakfast. He fully expected to make a sensation, but to his disappointment, no one paid any particular attention to him. There was plainly trouble in the air. His mother brought his stool to the table beside her and sat down, competently seeing to the needs of the family, but eating little and saying less. Henry Huff looked suddenly grayer, and Daniel older. The younger boys were puzzled and a little frightened, while poor Duberry jumped if he were so much as offered food.

‘Where’s Denny?’ David asked suddenly.

Mary Huff looked at her husband.

‘We don’t know,’ Henry Huff said briefly. ‘He seems not to have been here at all last night.’

David visibly restrained himself from offering information on this point, but his effort went unnoticed.

Robert Barclay said, ‘Aw, Denny’s ’ist run away on another fishing trip.’

Thomas Ellwood nodded his red head. ‘I’ll go down after breakfast and see if he took the boat. He likes to fish before a rain, and Father says it’s going to rain again.’

‘Didn’t he take anything, Mother?’ asked Robert

Barclay. 'Most always he walks off with the cold cornbread.'

'He didn't take any — cornbread.'

'What did he take, then?' the usually silent Mark demanded in his uncertain, changing voice.

'I didn't say he took anything, Mark,' his mother answered patiently. 'There is no food missing. If any of you know anything about Denny's plans you ought to tell us. We are anxious.'

Judith thought to herself, 'I'm glad he is gone; and I don't know where he is.'

She listened with inward approval to Henry Huff's morning reading from the Bible. He had chosen the cutting observations of the Hebrew proverb-maker on fools:

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.... They shall eat the fruit of their own way....'

'That man must have known some one like Denny,' she thought, feeling for the first time that the writings of the Bible might have some connection with reality.

After breakfast Mary Huff thought to remark on David's presence, and the little boy's spirits soared under the attention he received. He volunteered to feed the table-scraps to the chickens and, once outside the house, was held fascinated at the door of the blacksmith shop watching his father and Joseph John mend a wagon tire.

Judith attacked the endless household routine of bedmaking, dishwashing, and sweeping more awkwardly than usual, in spite of her stern resolution to atone for her trouble-making by being more useful. She was stiff and her feet were badly bruised. She was glad to escape observation under cover of the surprising depression that hung over the household, somehow centered in Denny's failure to appear.

'Does thee want to churn on the porch?' asked Mary Huff, wiping her hot forehead. 'Not a breath of air comes through the kitchen this morning, but I have to keep up the fire to bake bread.'

'Couldn't I churn down in the spring-house?'

'Yes, that would be still better.'

The spring-house was refreshingly cooled by the little stream that flowed through the milk-trough. Up and down, up and down, Judith pushed the wooden dasher in the tall churn. Every minute she grew sleepier with the monotonous motion, the gentle murmur of the water running over the cobblestones, and the twilight dimness. The tired girl nodded, caught herself, straightened, and nodded again. At last she rested her head on the top of the churn dasher, just for a moment, and there Dan found her asleep when he opened the spring-house door, stooped, and entered.

Judith woke in confusion, to which Dan paid no attention.

'I wanted to ask if Denny said anything to thee

about going off,' he began directly. 'That is, if thee doesn't mind telling,' he added, with unusual consideration.

Judith said with some embarrassment, 'He came to our window last night with some wild talk of going down the river in his boat to the Ohio, and back to Virginia.'

Dan whistled soundlessly. 'Was that all?'

The girl hesitated. 'He — he asked me to go back home with him. He seemed quite beside himself. But when I said No, I thought he might give up the whole notion. Even now that he is gone, I wouldn't feel sure that he had gone that way.'

'No,' said Dan thoughtfully. 'No, I wouldn't be sure either, knowing Denny.' He drummed on the wall with his knuckles. 'The trouble is,' he went on slowly, 'that Father's iron box disappeared last night, too. It may be that Denny took it, though I hate to think so. Maybe he thought there was money in it. There wasn't much money but there were valuable papers.'

Judith drew a horrified breath. 'I didn't think Denny would steal!'

'I didn't either. But the box is gone.'

'Maybe — maybe he had had too much hard cider.'

Dan gauged the girl with his keen blue eyes, and decided to make his own confession. 'I think he was still blind mad. I waited for him last night at the

river and ducked him — twice.' He looked down at the cut across the top of his boot, but it did not seem necessary to mention that detail. 'I haven't told Father that, for it would worry him, and I don't see that it would help.

'Maybe Denny's only gone down the river to cool off; if so, he'll be back when he gets hungry. The boys looked for his boat but couldn't find it.

'We both made mistakes last night, I suppose. Neither of us seems to know the way to manage Denny.'

Judith found herself smiling ruefully with the tall young man.

'See here!' said Dan. 'I know thy arms are all scratched up, and I know thee's tired from carrying Davy through the storm last night. I never thought a girl would have had that much grit! I'll send Tommy around to finish that churning. He needs a job. Last I saw of him he showed all the signs of looking for mischief, and we've had enough mischief in this family for one while.'

He was as good as his word. Thomas Ellwood appeared in a very short time, suspiciously willing. He took Judith's place on the bench by the wall and churned with such energy that the opening in the wooden lid around the dasher became a fountain of cream.

'Churn with both hands, Tommy; the dasher won't wobble so,' Judith recommended.

‘I’ve known how to churn longer than thee has,’ Thomas Ellwood retorted loftily.

Judith eyed him. ‘What has thee got in that pocket, Tommy? Why keep one hand over it?’

Thomas Ellwood shifted so as to bring the pocket in question out of view. ‘I druther churn with one hand,’ he asserted.

Just here the pocket heaved, and Thomas Ellwood was obliged to grab for it with both hands. The prisoner remained secure, but Judith had caught a glimpse of a pointed scaly nose and two bright slits of eyes.

‘Thomas Ellwood! That’s a snake! Take it out of here! Quick!’

‘Aw ——’ remonstrated Thomas Ellwood.

‘Don’t let it go!’

‘It won’t hurt anything. It’s a milk-snake. Rob and me has wanted a pair for a long time, and we found this one this morning under the weaving-room. They eat rats and mice around houses, and I was going to turn this one loose in the spring-house to catch the mouse that bothers Mother’s cheese. Now thee’s spoiled it!’

‘Take — it — away!’ Judith ordered.

Thomas Ellwood went. ‘Can I put it back under the weaving-room?’ he made a final appeal. ‘Mark says they always have mates. Maybe this one would feel happy there and stay till its mate came. I want to see them both.’

‘Don’t thee dare!’ Judith took up the churn dasher again.

‘We *need* a snake to catch mice,’ Thomas Ellwood grumbled. ‘Thy cat’s no good.’

It was entirely too true, Judith thought, that Sir Thomas was not a useful country cat; nor was she a very useful member of this household. She thought over the night before, as she lifted the heavy mass of butter out of the buttermilk and worked in the salt with the wooden paddle. Perhaps if she had refused to go to the party Denny would have lost interest and stayed at home, or if he had gone he would not have been punished for neglecting his two guests. Part of the responsibility for his disappearance seemed to rest on her shoulders, beginning with her unfortunate slip about old Duberry, about which she hoped that Denny had forgotten by this time.

She thought, ‘I wonder why the papers in the iron box were important. Dan didn’t say.’

It was a distinct satisfaction among her worries to shape the butter into a smooth block and print across the top the design of leaf and flower that always pleased Mary Huff; to set it down to cool and put the clean churn outside for an airing. One thing she had learned to do well in these summer weeks.

Rain was beginning to fall again from the heavy clouds as she went up to the house. Mark sat on the porch, whittling. The unwonted excitement had

loosened his tongue, though it had not served to steady the quavers in his voice.

‘Good thing thee got in,’ he hailed Judith companionably. ‘It’s going to rain again, hard.’

‘It will be good for the corn, won’t it?’ Judith answered, using a phrase she had heard many times through the summer.

‘Nope. It’s rained plenty now. More rain is likely to wash the fields.’

‘Oh!’ said Judith, not particularly interested. ‘What’s thee making, Mark?’

The boy held out the stout white hickory stick he was whittling. The end was beginning to bush out with thin shavings, still attached to the stick about ten inches up.

‘I’m frazzlin’ out the end of this stick to make a scrubbin’ broom.’

‘I never saw such a family,’ Judith said. ‘You can make anything!’

‘We have to, if we get it,’ Mark returned gruffly, but he was pleased.

He looked up shyly at Judith. ‘I tell thee one thing we can’t do, but thee can.’

‘Make a design on the butter,’ Judith smiled.

‘Yes, thee can. I heard Father say he was going to make thee a wooden butter-mold of thy own with that pattern cut in it. But that isn’t what I meant.’

‘A suit for David!’

‘That’s more like it.’ Mark whittled faster, red

through his freckles. 'Mother says Joseph John and I may ask thee if thee will stitch a fine shirt for each of us. Mother says she ain't got the time or the patience; but she will get some cloth for them if thee will make them.

'Next winter,' Mark confided, whittling on, 'I'll be sixteen, and Father says I may attend the literary society at the Pleasant Heights school. Joseph John went last year and he was in a debate! We need good shirts, thee sees.'

Judith was unaccountably touched. 'I'll make shirts for any of you that want shirts,' she promised, adding thoughtfully, 'I'm nearly sixteen myself.'

'Is thee?' Mark was surprised. 'I thought thee was most as old as Dan. I tell thee — thee may ride with me on my horse to the literary society next winter. If Father gives me a horse!'

Judith smiled at the long-legged boy. 'I feel a hundred years old in my bones to-day; but maybe I'll be younger by winter.'

Mark stared at her.

The rain was falling heavily on the already sodden ground, and so it continued all afternoon. Not even the industry of the Huff family was proof against it. The set-in porch became a family gathering place, where the twins teased David and the raccoon, and the older boys mended harness intermittently, but oftener looked out on the rain-blurred world. Henry Huff and Dan came splash-

ing up from the barn about four o'clock and looked out from the bluff's edge over the river valley. They tramped off down the road almost at once, returning later with serious faces.

'The river has broken through the bank below the road and there is a fairly good-sized stream running across Dan's field,' Henry Huff told his wife. 'From the way the river is rising it must have rained even harder north of here.'

Dan made another trip down to the valley just before the rainy darkness closed in. 'It's getting wider,' he reported on his return.

'How's the bridge holding?' Henry Huff questioned with interest.

'Solid as a meeting-house.'

'I thought it would. Thee built it well.'

'With thy help.'

His father waved this aside. 'It was thy plan and mostly thy labor, Dan'l. I guess any of us are ready to help in a good cause, without taking credit.'

Judith and David were sent across the narrow stretch of paving to the weaving-cabin, well wrapped against the wet. The little boy chuckled when they were safely out of hearing.

'They don't know how wet we were last night, do they, Judith? I like rain!'

Till well after midnight the raindrops drummed monotonously on the heavy shingles. When that

sound died away Judith was wakened by its absence, and by a new voice that caught up the watery chorus, a confused, rushing, roaring sound from farther away.

The girl went back to sleep without troubling her tired brain to identify its note, but when she wakened in the morning there was hardly need for her to look out across the bottom-lands to know what had happened in the night. All over the lowest level of the valley spread a muddy yellow-brown flood. There was no road, no cornfield. The trees along the banks showed where the river had been confined the day before, but now these stood in water and trailed their vines in the flood.

‘There’s Dan’s bridge; I can see Dan’s bridge!’ David exclaimed delightedly. ‘See that sort of whirlpool, Judith? That’s the middle pen.’ He curled his bare toes in the tiny pools that stood among the cobblestones. ‘I’m going down to wade along the edge of the water after breakfast, Judith. Come along!’

Judith shook her head. ‘I’m going to work. Thy mother said she would show me how to weave this morning.’

The twins were as excited as David. They understood how serious a blow was the destruction of Dan’s corn crop; but it was impossible for them to weigh this loss against the rare spectacle of the river in summer flood.

'Is it as wide as the Ohio now, Father? Could it float a steamboat? Le's make a steamboat and see!'

'It won't be up more than a day or two, now the rain has stopped,' Henry Huff answered quietly. 'Dan'l says it has already dropped two or three inches. We'd hardly have time to build a steamboat before night, would we?'

'Aw ——' the twins complained.

'We may be able to save part of Dan'l's corn yet,' their father went on. 'Dan'l says he can see some of the tops along the edge.'

Corn did not interest the twins. Immediately after their chores were done they scrambled down from the slippery face of the bluff, across the narrow shelf of the second bottom where the flood had not reached, and down to the edge of the river, to explore among the driftwood it was leaving stranded as it imperceptibly receded.

When old Duberry came along apologetically, sight-seeing and looking for traces of his flooded truck-patch, they had just discovered a small log drifting by, carrying as passenger a half-grown, beady-eyed opossum. With one impulse they waded in and steered the log to shore. This was, the 'possum realized, no time to play dead. He clung to his raft, prepared to fight, and had to be poked off with a stick; but once on the land he dropped on his side, apparently dead from the sharp tip of his nose to the end of his bare tail.

'Don' let 'im sneak away from you-all,' Duberry admonished, roused from his usual diffidence. 'I knows 'bout 'possums. Lemme take dis lil feller an' fatten him up till sweet-tater time, and you' ma cook 'im den for a fine meal.'

The twins considered. 'That's all right,' Robert Barclay decided generously. 'Duberry can take him, can't he, Tommy, if he will let us count him in our c'llection? Thee has to make the cage for him, Duberry,' he admonished sternly. 'Tommy and me can't be bothered with that.'

'Sho,' Duberry chuckled. 'I keep 'im safe. Look at 'im now, edgin' out an' turnin' over so slow he think we don't see.' He picked up the little gray beast by his half-curved tail. 'Put 'im in my ol' hat. See, he cain't git out. I b'lieve I jist sa'nter on; maybe I pick up annuder 'possum!'

'All right,' Robert Barclay granted his permission. 'But thee remember! Whatever animal thee finds goes into our c'llection till we get ready to eat it!'

'Sho does,' Duberry grinned and shuffled off.

The twins dropped him out of mind. Thomas Ellwood said, 'I don't see why we can't make a steamboat even if Father won't. This water ain't going down so fast. There's lots of it left.'

'We could make a boat,' agreed his brother, 'but we would just have to pretend an engine if Father won't help. Joseph John, even, can't make an

engine yet. He laughed at me when I asked him.'

'I'll be the engine,' proposed Thomas Ellwood. 'Thee be the captain and I'll be the engine. Now all we have to do is to make the boat.'

'*I* want to be the engine. I'm going to be on the boat.'

The twins turned and frowned at David's intrusion with comical twin frowns.

'Folks couldn't tell which of you was engine and which was captain,' David argued. 'Let Tommy be the engineer. It won't matter so much if they can't tell captain and engineer apart.'

'Don't thee be so smart! I'd take thee back to Mother if I wasn't so busy,' threatened Robert Barclay.

'Let me stay, Rob,' pleaded David. 'Honest, I could be a good engine!'

'Thee never saw an engine in thy life,' his elder brother retorted. 'I'd have to tell thee how to be it. But I tell thee what: I'll let thee stay if thee'll help.'

'I'll help,' David promised eagerly.

'Tommy and me are going to catch some more logs and tie them together with grapevine,' said Robert Barclay, kicking the 'possum's log; and Thomas Ellwood nodded as seriously as if this had been planned for months between them. 'But jist grapevine won't be stout enough by itself. Thee run up to the blacksmith shop and get that chain Father was working on yesterday. It's right back

of the door; I saw it there this morning. Thee bring that down, Davy. Bring it around the back way when nobody's there.'

'Won't Father want us to have it?'

Robert Barclay looked justly exasperated. 'Father would want us to make a good steamboat if we made a steamboat at all, wouldn't he? Run along and get that chain and don't let anybody catch thee!'

By the time David returned, dragging the heavy chain through the mud, the river had kindly floated two more logs within the twins' wading range, and the three were lined up with one end on solid ground. Thomas Ellwood was tugging at an awkward branch, and Robert Barclay was sawing at a near-by grapevine with a knife that wobbled on the handle and refused to cut.

'I told thee to sharpen that on the whetstone yesterday,' said Thomas Ellwood. 'I couldn't make it work when I tried to cut my name on the doorstep.'

'Then why didn't thee sharpen it thy own self?' Robert Barclay demanded as he dug and slashed at the tough brown stem.

'Let's pull the whole vine down,' suggested his twin. They swung their weight on it until the whole spreading vine loosened from the tree-top and fell in a leafy muddle on the slope. Out of this the twins selected smaller ropes that could be torn

away from the parent stem, and these they twisted round their logs in workmanlike style, having first secured the logs with the chain, hooked back into one of its own links.

The resulting boat was highly satisfactory. David made a competent engine, with a whistle that could hardly be improved upon, and a puff-puff which after much practicing the twins thought would take their craft along fast enough.

At first they were content for their boat to remain where it was, half floating in the water, half lodged on shore, where the current tugged gently at them but could not move them. The weight of the crew kept the deck under water most of the time, but the sun was hot and it was pleasant to splash up and down in the water. Other possibilities, however, soon suggested themselves.

Robert Barclay said, 'There's that thick ol' vine we couldn't chop off. It'll reach down here. Le's tie it to the boat, so's we can push off and float.'

Thomas Ellwood agreed enthusiastically, and though the vine was so stiff that it refused to be knotted they were not balked. They brought its end up under the logs and between them, back of the chain lashing, and the end that projected above Robert Barclay decided must be their tiller. 'Can't get away, so long as I hold this,' he said practically, and turned his attention to the perils of the deep. The three logs were now in water their entire

length, but still so close to shore that the nearer end rested on the ground.

They now left the Ohio, proceeded with expedition down the Mississippi to the Gulf, and set their course across the broad Atlantic. Robert Barclay found it necessary to speak sternly to the engine.

‘Don’t whistle, Davy! Thee wastes steam. Keep on puffing! We got to hurry over the ocean before our provisions give out.’

David puffed on obediently, but he began to look up and down the shore for diversion, and through the trees, far down, he caught sight of old Duberry.

‘Injuns!’ yelled David in delightful excitement. It was a sorrow to him that of all the Indian tribes that had left behind their arrow-heads to be plowed up in the spring there remained only one forlorn and conventionally dressed old man in all the country-side. For a moment he almost persuaded himself that he saw a wild Delaware in his blanket.

Thomas Ellwood turned. So did Robert Barclay, captain. The stiff grapevine straightened and whipped down between the logs, leaving the logs free; the current seized the raft, and they were off on a real voyage.

Robert Barclay had been at fault, but he was also the first to see the situation and to assume command.

'We're loose,' he shouted, 'and we ain't got oars or anything. Tommy, swim to shore, quick, and get us help! I'll take care of Davy!'

Thomas Ellwood looked around and understood the danger at once. He measured the distance to shore, rapidly increasing, and splashed off into the yellow flood, paddling frog-fashion for land. He had never swum before except in the shallower parts of the river, where he could put his feet down to find bottom, and here he had no idea how deep the water might be, but he fought on, and came at last breathlessly to shore, some yards below the spot where they had been tied up.

When he looked around he saw the raft being carried steadily along by the current. The two boys had crawled to the middle and there Robert Barclay held David with one protecting arm, while with the other he attempted to keep the grapevine lashing secure.

Thomas Ellwood set off the bluff. There was no one at the barn, no one in the house to answer his frantic call. His heart pushed up in his throat and thumped so loudly that he almost failed to hear the slow tramp of the loom treadles when at last, for want of breath and courage, he stopped calling.

'Where's Father?' he demanded accusingly when he burst into the weaving-cabin, where his mother was absorbed in teaching Judith how to throw the shuttle.

'Thy father and the boys went back to the woods to see if any of the stock had been mired down by this rain,' his mother answered disapprovingly. 'Thee looks very disorderly, Thomas Ellwood. I hope thee hasn't let David get as wet as thee is.'

Tears began to spill out of Thomas Ellwood's eyes. 'Then David and Rob will be drowned,' he said. 'They are out on the river and none of the rest of us can help them.'

Mary Huff turned very white and drooped forward on the complicated harness of the loom. 'Thee — will — have — to — go — Judith,' she whispered.

'Where are the boys, Tommy?' Judith asked, not daring to let herself feel any emotion.

'Way down stream.'

'We'll have to leave thy mother. Come on!'

Thomas Ellwood had no faith in Judith's capabilities, and it frightened him to think of returning to the river to see his brothers lost. He stood limply where he was, until Judith grasped his arm and jerked him after her out of the cabin.

'Now, show me!'

The boy cleared his eyes with the back of his muddy forearm and led off silently. Down where the raft had been launched there was nothing to be seen of it. Judith ran down the shore line, leaving Thomas Ellwood lagging behind.

'I see them, Tommy, I see them!' she called.

The raft had drifted so far out in the water that it was halfway over to the river-bed by the time it had reached the south end of Daniel's cornfield. There it was beginning to thread its course among the trees, bumping and seesawing against the trunks. Robert Barclay's red head flashed this way and that as he grabbed for overhanging branches and spread his arms in an effort to grasp the tree trunks, but it was only when they reached the upper side of a thicket of small trees, bent by the current, that the raft came at last to an uncertain halt. Robert Barclay clung to one of the little trees and David clung to him.

Judith said, 'Tommy, thee will have to find thy father! Run!' Her brown eyes flashed down at him as she shook his shoulder.

'It won't do any good,' Thomas Ellwood choked, but after one look at the girl's determined face he dug his bare toes into the yellow clay of the bluff and climbed as fast as he could.

'If I could swim! If I could do anything!' Judith wrung her hands.

It was clear that Robert Barclay was having trouble with his loosely constructed craft; he kicked one heel against the grapevine lashing, but he had no free hand to pull it tight again, and every time the current bumped them against the thicket the grapevine loosened. If the raft went to pieces Robert Barclay might be able to swim to refuge in a

larger tree, but David could not swim nor could he be expected to support himself long from any of the slender branches near them.

Judith shook her head as if to deny the sight of little David in peril; spoiled, clever, affectionate David, whom Judith had coaxed back to health, now such a little way from her, and nothing she could do to help.

She began to run aimlessly down the edge of the flood, through wet bushes, mud, and tangling wild cucumber vines, skirting piles of débris brought down by the water, searching the horizon for anything that might give the least hope of rescue.

Once, against her will, she looked across to the two boys on the raft. It was more difficult to get a clear view of them here, but they appeared to be struggling with the logs. She looked away again quickly.

Then, far ahead of her, appeared a blessed sight. She hesitated only long enough to make sure of it and then ran on.

‘Duberry!’ she called. ‘Duberry, Duberry!’

Nearer it drew through the tree trunks, a flat-bottomed boat, leisurely rowed along by a stoop-shouldered, white-crowned figure.

‘Is you call me, Miss Judith?’ he quavered in meek surprise. All summer Judith had disregarded him so far as she could.

Judith made a wide gesture of command and he pulled closer. She was not even surprised that Duberry should have a boat; it was a boat, wherever it came from, and desperately needed.

‘The boys are over there in the woods,’ she called, as soon as she could make herself understood. ‘Go get them, before they drown.’ She pointed toward the thicket, now nearly opposite them, but hidden by the intervening tangle of woods.

Judith turned and started back up the river, and to her distress old Duberry rowed on in the same direction.

‘They are over there!’

‘Mmm-hmm, Miss Judith; I hears you, but I got to git higher iffen I cross dis current.’

She could see that he was pulling strongly at the oars, although his progress seemed slow, and she was wise enough to restrain herself from any attempt to hurry him.

‘I sees ’em! I kin make it now!’ he called reassuringly at last, turning the nose of the boat directly across the stream.

Only then did Judith dare to look back at the spot where she had last seen the two boys. They were in dangerous plight. The three logs had separated; two were washing around near by, and Robert Barclay had David in front of him astride of the third, which was weighted entirely under water, bobbing back and forth continually against the

yielding barrier, and held from slipping only by the grasp of the two on the young trees.

Even thus, Robert Barclay kept his head. Judith saw him sight Duberry in the boat, then look upstream, and shout a shrill warning. Duberry had achieved a good diagonal across the stream, until he was close to the boys and nearly above them. At the same time, farther upstream and toward the river, a great log had been drifting down. It was gray and old, completely bare of bark. For many years, since it had first fallen to the river bank, it had lain there, resisting all floods until this one came tugging at it. Branches and stumps had been piled up behind it; when it had finally been loosened from its resting place these came with it, helter-skelter.

Until it reached the edge of the clearing its course had been safely separate from that of Duberry's boat. Then the shrewd eyes of Robert Barclay saw the log caught against a stout tree trunk, balanced and played with by the current, and finally whirled toward the thicket where the boys were lodged.

One shout was enough to warn Duberry. He saw the danger but he made no attempt to avoid it; instead he increased his speed in front of it, reaching the boys even before the advance guard of floating branches, released as the log changed end about. Judith saw the boat tip as first David and then the older boy were hastily hauled in, and then the

great log bore down upon them and cut off the view.

The thicket was not strong enough to stand against its weight; it traveled majestically on, bearing down the little trees before it, but out at one side below the thicket shot the boat and there were still two bright heads and one woolly one in it.

Judith drew a long tired breath and sat down on a broad rock conveniently near. They could get along without her now. It was curious, she thought, how she had seemed all this time to be pushing the boat, though she had really done nothing.

She was sitting there quietly when Henry Huff and his three oldest sons came trooping down the bluff, with footsore Thomas Ellwood limping in the rear. They had paused in their hurried approach long enough to see from the top of the bluff Duberry and his cargo approaching slowly upstream, and their anxious silence had changed into shouts of encouragement and relieved chatter.

More strong hands than were needed pulled the boat to shore. Henry Huff lifted David out and held him close. Joseph John solemnly attempted to assist Robert Barclay from the boat, but he was hindered in this attention by Robert Barclay's fear of being babied, and Thomas Ellwood's battery of questions. Duberry laid his oars down and gingerly raised first one sore shoulder and then the other. When Dan offered him a hand up he grinned broadly.

'Des a minute, Mist' Dan. Wants to see how my 'possum enjoyed hisself.' He gathered up a wet and dirty bundle which had been firmly anchored under his broad foot.

'Put 'im in m' hat. Sometimes I could feel him wiggle, but mostly he had sense enough to play daid.' He chuckled. 'Looks all right. We eat him yit. Now, Mist' Dan, iffen you holds him a minute I kin make out to git up. Sho! I ain't had such a work-out since d' fall I work on d' James, carryin' tobacco down to Richmond!'

Dan held the sodden hat-brim carefully together while the old man crawled out over the edge of the boat and painfully straightened up.

Robert Barclay said, 'Don't thee forget, Duberry! That 'possum belongs to our c'lection!'

'Son,' Henry Huff admonished him, 'thee probably owes thy life to our friend Duberry here. Thee was in very great danger. I want thee and David to thank him, as I do.'

Robert Barclay looked much interested. 'I thank thee,' he said promptly to Duberry, and went on up the bluff with his twin.

'Thee wasn't ever in great danger, like David and me,' Judith heard him crowing over Thomas Ellwood. 'Did thee hear Father say I was in very great danger?'

She might as well follow the twins, Judith thought; probably she should have gone sooner to

see if Mary Huff had recovered herself. This, like most of the Huffs' affairs, was evidently a man's business.

She had not climbed far before she heard some one following her, and looked up into Dan's face.

'Who told Duberry to get the boys?' he asked. 'Did thee?'

'Why, yes,' Judith answered, surprised.

'I guessed as much,' Dan said quietly. 'That was well done.'

'I did nothing,' Judith protested, warm with unreasonable gratitude, but Dan was already thinking of something else.

'Did thee notice? That was Denny's boat.'

CHAPTER X

TO MEETING AND BACK

WHEN Grandfather Halloway came riding along on horseback ten days later the river was shrunken again to its normal width. He sent his horse through it carefully, but there were none of the dangerous holes that a flood often scoops out in a shallow ford, and he was free to cast inquiring glances at Daniel's bridge and the Huff lands.

He found Dan toiling among the forlorn remains of his once flourishing cornfield. Where the high tasseled stalks had waved in close ranks there were now sandy gullies, and silted down, shredded leaves, interspersed with trails of muddy driftwood. Only on the islands of higher ground had the plants been able to hold their heads above water and survive.

'Dan'l! Dan'l Huff!' called Grandfather Halloway. He studied the young man's face as he came over to the road. 'Ain't got much corn left, I see,' he greeted him.

'No,' Dan agreed. He was even thinner than he had been in the summer, but Grandfather found no look of defeat in his eyes.

He proceeded remorselessly on the same line. 'Thy bridge seems a little whee-whaw since the flood.'

‘That far pen got washed around by the high water, but we can still use it to cross on.’

‘Umm-mm,’ said Grandfather, less in a growl than a purr. ‘I see you got the road mended across the bottom here,’ he commended. ‘After the goose-drownder we had I was afraid I couldn’t make it in a carriage.’

‘We worked at the road last week.’

Grandfather nodded and returned to the attack. ‘Well, I reckon you will give up the idea of a railroad now. Another flood like this would wash it clear to the Gulf.’

To his intense, but completely concealed, delight, Dan fired up at once.

‘No,’ he said. ‘No, Joseph Halloway!’ He faced about for the view down the valley. ‘I can show thee! We plan to run the railroad along the far side of the second bottom level, thee knows. See! The flood hasn’t touched that!’

‘The only plans we have had to change were for the culverts to carry off the water from the bluffs. We hadn’t planned them large enough. A flood like this would have washed them out and the track with them. But it was better for us to find that out before the track was laid, even if it took a flood to show us!’

‘Umm-mm,’ said Grandfather Halloway again. ‘Well, I’m afraid by the looks of this field that thee won’t have much ready cash to put in it this year.’

The point told. 'No,' said Dan. 'No, it will take longer.' He looked out over the miserable remains of his corn. 'But it's a good plan and we'll carry it out some day!'

'I had thought some,' Grandfather Halloway broke the silence that followed, 'I had thought some of building a toll road up along the other side of the river. What would thee think of that? Folks ought to be willing to pay toll for the use of a good solid plank road, oughtn't they? I hear there is likely to be a bill through the state legislature, allowing companies to build plank roads and charge a fair toll.'

'Father and I have talked about them,' said Dan. 'We don't think plank roads are the kind to build. They need too good a foundation and they rot out too fast. We think gravel roads are better. And we think a railroad would be of more value than either.'

To this Grandfather Halloway made no direct reply. 'I must be gettin' on,' he said presently. 'I was ridin' up to Kingston, but I thought I might stop and see how the flood dealt with you.'

'Won't thee go up to see the folks and Judith?'

'No-o,' the old man said thoughtfully. 'No. I guess not. Remember me to them kindly. How are they all?'

Dan hesitated. 'Had thee heard that Denny disappeared the night the heavy rain began? We

haven't had word from him since. We found his boat downstream, piled up with the driftwood.'

'No telling what has happened, I suppose.' Grandfather Halloway shook his head gravely and gathered up his reins. He did not notice that Dan was hunting for words to continue the subject. 'Well — thee got any better opinion of our Judith by this time?'

'I don't know what to make of her,' Dan answered, frowning. 'Mother says she has a real knack at weaving, and she's learning the loom fast. But take soap-making. Mother started to make soap yesterday; we swung the big kettle out in the side yard, and Mother mixed the grease and the lye from the ash-hopper, and the twins built the fire under the kettle. All Judith had to do was to stand there and stir the soap till it came to the right consistency, but she couldn't manage it! Thee knows the way the hot soap pops out after it begins to boil. Judith got blisters all over her arms and Mother had to send for Mark to finish stirring.'

'Mark must have been riled.'

'No, Mark thinks pretty well of Judith. It seems Judith is making him a fine shirt to wear to the Literary Society this winter.'

'Does thee judge I'd better look for another place for the girl by the end of summer?'

'No, I don't think that would be fair to Judith,' Dan answered hastily. 'She is just beginning to

learn our ways. It would be hard on her to start in somewhere else. I think she does the best she can. It's not her fault she wasn't brought up with people that work. And David would miss her.'

'Oh, David would miss her,' Grandfather Hallo-way repeated soberly. 'David would miss her, would he? Well, we ought to consider that.' He looked down at the red-crested head beside him. 'Better get her to make thee a fine shirt, too, Dan'l.'

Dan stiffened in angry amazement. 'I can do very well with what I have,' he answered.

The little twinkle had returned to the old man's eye.

'Well, of course,' he admitted blandly, 'shirts ain't very important to thee and me. I've been wonderin', Dan'l, since I've been here — The floodgates to the mill-race were strained last week with all that water. Thee knows I rent out the grist-mill, but repairs like that I tend to myself. I was on my way to Kingston to see a man there, but it come to me that maybe thee and one of the boys could do this jist as well for me and mebbe a little cheaper.

'What's thee say? Want to come down to-morrow and make me a guess on the cost? I could lend thee my ox team if thee needs it to haul stone or timbers, and I expect that between us we have tools enough.'

Dan's eyes shone. 'Joseph John and I could

come down this afternoon. I've done about all I can for this corn. I'll be glad of a chance to make a little money; most of mine has been washed down the river.'

Dan felt it his duty to speak first to Judith about her grandfather's visit. He dispatched Thomas Ellwood to the spring with the bucket that Judith was about to fill. 'And thee bring the butter and milk from the spring-house, too,' he ordered when the boy ventured to complain.

To Judith he said, 'Joseph Halloway came over the river to see me this morning. He sent his regards to thee.'

'Did he leave any news?' Judith asked in disappointment. 'I thought Mother would have come out here before this.'

'We didn't talk about the family. Judith, I told him Denny was gone, but I didn't tell him that Father's iron box had gone, too. I don't feel right about that.'

'What was in the box? Why ought Grandfather to be told?'

'I never told thee, did I? We haven't talked about it to any one. The deed to the farm was there, and the certificates of Father's bank stock. Father can get duplicates for those. But the papers we hate most to lose are the agreements with land-owners all up and down the river to let us build the railroad along their land without cost. Some of

them I'm afraid we can never get again without paying high for them. And of course Joseph Hallows ought to know that before he decides to invest.'

'Well?'

'There are two reasons why I don't go ahead and tell him. The folks don't want it noised around that Denny took anything, for the sake of his reputation. We have no real proof; we only suspect him. And Mother feels badly about Denny; she thinks he is drowned.

'And maybe I'm wrong, but I don't want Joseph Hallows discouraged until we are sure the box won't turn up. I keep looking for it. A day or two ago I found Denny's old work clothes back in a dark corner of the barn. Maybe the box is hid away like the clothes.

'Does thee think he ought to be told?'

'No, I don't,' said Judith. 'And I won't tell him. But there is no need to worry about his asking me. He didn't even think enough of me to ride up the hill to see me this morning.'

Dan looked down at the sober figure and experienced one of his rare moments of really seeing the girl. The red splotches on her hands and arms were dark and broad; she must have stood a good deal of punishment from that boiling kettle before she asked for help. Under her beautiful crown of hair her face was older and thinner. Dan felt suddenly remiss; something must be done for Judith.

‘See here,’ he said kindly, ‘if thee wants to see thy folks I’ll take thee to meeting at town. Would thee like to do that?’

‘Oh, Dan! Would you?’

‘I don’t mind. I haven’t told thee — I’ll be going down every week-day for a while to repair the floodgates at the mill-race. Thy grandfather decided to give the job to Joseph John and me,’ he announced proudly.

‘And don’t think that Joseph Halloway doesn’t keep thee in mind! He does. I’ve been surprised at how much he asks about thee.’

Judith took this rather doubtful compliment without offense. She even smiled.

‘I don’t see why he should, when I remember that there are seven more of us children right around his doorstep. And of course Mother didn’t come to see me often when I lived with Grandmother Lankester. I wonder if they have heard from home.’

The first edge of her resentment at being transported to this new country had been dulled, but an aching homesickness had grown on her. It had become easier to forget Grandmother Lankester’s stormy temper and to remember only her lavish generosity and her passionate affection for her granddaughter. Not once had Grandmother Lankester written to her or sent her a message; but in Judith’s memory that beautiful house became more

and more surely her true home, to which she must some day return, though she waited until she was old.

When Mary Huff heard that Judith wanted to go to meeting she was pleased. 'David, thee can go with us,' she said. 'No, thee can't ride with Daniel and Judith. There isn't room enough on one horse.'

The two took their sedate journey of an hour's length in almost complete silence. Dan's mind was busy with the problem of mending the floodgates without suspending the operations of the gristmill; and Judith, seated on the pillion, thought back over the summer.

She wore, that warm bright morning, a dark calico given her by Mary Huff, cut down to fit her slimness, with a white kerchief round her neck, and over her shoulders a little shawl with the point hanging exactly in the middle of her back and the ends pinned in neat pleats at the front of her slender waist. Mary Huff had no extra bonnet to lend, and Judith had snipped flowers and ribbon from one of her own and tied it unadorned under her pretty chin.

'Well — thee looks neat!' Mary Huff had said when, together, they had Judith properly dressed for meeting. She found herself inwardly regretting that not one of Judith's feathery ringlets escaped the bonnet.

Judith answered with surprising satisfaction, 'No one will notice me.' Mary Huff was fortunately not the person to tell her that her finely cut features and dark eyes were likely to attract attention even in the plainest costume.

Judith remembered how the quiet congregation had stared at her when she appeared at meeting with her mother and sisters a day or two after they reached Grandfather Halloway's. To young Charity, or Phebe they said, 'So thee's Charity Halloway's girl! Well, well, thee has a look of thy grandmother,' or of some great-aunt or uncle, as the case might be; but to Judith, blossoming in a widespread blue-flowered frock, they said, doubtfully looking her up and down, 'Is thee John Lankester's daughter? I have heard of the family.' Judith felt that they did not approve of her or the Lankester family.

At the time she had told herself that she did not care what these backwoods Hoosiers thought of her; but she was nevertheless glad that David gave her an excuse for staying away from meeting and the chilly glances.

'They won't notice me at all,' she reassured herself, as she slipped off the pillion at the broad stump that served as upping-block. She went in at the door to the women's side of the meeting-house. Meeting had already set, but there was still an empty space on the straight-backed bench where



MEETING HAD ALREADY SET

the Lankester family sat, and there Judith seated herself.

The bent, meditative faces of the ministers and elders on the facing-gallery were matched by those in the body of the meeting. Silence reigned so completely that the song of a little sparrow outside and the pawing of a restless horse were plainly heard; but down the Lankester bench ran a pleasant ripple of recognition, from Polly's bounce of delight to the shy smile that tucked in one corner of Phebe's mouth.

When the stately old man who sat 'head of the meeting' had shaken hands with his neighbor to show that meeting was over, Polly clambered into Judith's lap and hugged her tight, while their mother bent over and the sisters came as close as the narrow space would permit.

'I am glad to see thee, Judith,' said Charity Lankester. 'It has been a great trial to me not to be able to come out; but thee knows I have been busy. Father has told me thee was doing as well as we could expect, and he hopes to bring me out soon.'

'Judith looks older,' commended young Charity, who felt it was very pleasant to be as grown-up as she herself was.

'Judith looks different,' said Phebe, regarding the bare bonnet with a milliner's eye.

'Judith is just my own Judith,' Polly exclaimed

jealously. 'Does thee make doll clothes for David? Melinda needs some more.'

'No,' smiled Judith, 'but I made a new suit for David, and thee may see that when thee comes out with Mother. May she come, too, Mother?'

'I hope so. We must speak to these Friends now, Judith. Come, Polly.'

Polly climbed down reluctantly. 'How is Sir Thomas?'

'Very beautiful and very lazy. Thee may see him, and the twins' pet 'coon and the 'possum and whatever else they have then. Turtles or tadpoles, very likely.'

A quavering old voice was saying at her shoulder, 'Is this thy other daughter, Charity? Let me speak to her,' and Judith was turned around for inspection by a pair of dim eyes under a drab bonnet-brim.

'Henry Huff was telling me about thee just the other day. Said thee was a sight of help. I don't wonder at it. Thee ain't got one of thy mother's features, but thee has her look just the same. Thee's going to be a good woman.'

Judith was so taken aback by this unexpected form of praise that she could not frame a reply before the bonnet-brim had turned away. Not every one who shook her hand was equally discerning, but all were kindly, and Judith came out from the meeting-house with wholesomely increased self-respect.

That made it easier to ask, 'Has thee heard from home, Mother?'

'I have had a letter from thy Grandmother Lankester.'

'Did she send any word to me?'

'No,' said her mother compassionately. 'No, Judith. This was just to say that Uncle Mose and Aunt Tildy were not doing well, and she felt sure they would come to be a public charge. I have written to Lynchburg friends to inquire about them, but I have not yet heard. I hope they are not in such serious difficulty as she seems to think.'

Dan was waiting at the upping-block. Judith seated herself behind him and they went back up the river road, each with his own thoughts for company. After a long time Dan drew rein and spoke over his shoulder.

'Can thee slip over into the saddle and take the horse on? Wait for me by the ford. I won't be long.'

None of the wooded roadside was familiar to Judith. 'Where are we?' she asked.

'At our woods, on past Lacy's. I want to look for something.'

Judith watched him disappear under and through the thicket tangle until the sunlight no longer touched his red hair, and then, with a little shudder, she rode on.

She had found herself left with a horror of the deep woods ever since the night she had escaped by

good fortune from Haydock. Even in broad daylight she refused to explore with David for herbs or bark beyond sight of the cleared fields, and when they two went sometimes of evenings down the trodden cowpaths to bring the herd home for the milking she hurried, glancing around for something that might be waiting to pounce on her from the shadows; and the fear was as real as if it had reasonable cause. It was not like Judith to be afraid. She tried to forget it and to avoid the places where it came over her, until the time came when it should disappear.

For the little springs that escaped from the hill-sides she had a growing fondness. When she reached the roadside spring walled in with the hollow 'gum' she dismounted, and went through a ceremony that David and she had invented. First she chewed a pungent leaf from the peppermint clump near by, until her tongue burnt pleasantly, and then she took a long drink that seemed twice as cool by reason of following the peppermint.

Dan found her there, clearing the water of leaves and stray twigs that had fallen into it from the trees that shot high above. He held out his hand for her foot, lifted her to the back of the horse, and, mounting himself, sent the horse splashing through the ford.

'I had an idea,' he said, as if talking to himself. 'Supposing Denny wasn't drowned. We have no

proof that he was. Supposing his boat had just drifted away and he had gone somewhere without it, what would he do with Father's iron box? It would be heavy to carry around and Denny was never one to go to extra labor. And he had no key to open that strong padlock. Father wore the key on his watch chain.

'I thought that Denny might have taken the box away and hidden it, thinking he would come back, maybe, or just for spite. I remembered a big, hollow tree standing out there in the woods — what's the matter?'

'That — that was where we hid, the night of the storm.'

'The good-for-nothing!' Dan said angrily. 'I can't be sorry I ducked Denny for that, no matter what happened. I wish I had ducked Haydock, too!'

He forgot to go on until Judith prompted him.

'What about the tree?'

'Oh, the tree! Well I had reasons for thinking about that place. I heard the other day that Haydock's horse was taken from Lacy's the night of the storm. Now, I'm not saying that Denny had anything to do with that horse, but *if* he did then he might have come close to this tree, and he knew all about it. It was the place where he used to store his fishing-tackle and the odds and ends that he wanted to have around when he played hooky for a

while. The twins said he had a piece of a blanket and an old frying-pan.

‘I made a wild guess that he might have buried Father’s box there in the tree, but I could find no sign of it. There wasn’t room. The roots are still too solid and close to the surface, and there is no sign that they have been disturbed. So I don’t know any more than I did before.’

He sighed deeply and looked away down the river-valley. Never could his eye traverse that second bottom without seeing a funnel-piped engine trundling its box-cars of grain and lumber along a beautifully constructed grade, drawing them to market quickly, easily, and cheaply; but he was beginning to fear that it would be a long time before he would smell its smoke and hear its whistle.

Judith guessed his thought. She said, ‘You want that railroad very badly, don’t you, Dan?’

‘And I’m going to get it,’ Dan answered.

‘Yes, I think you will,’ the girl answered. ‘At first I thought you were all a little crazy, but then I had never known any family like yours. You haven’t slaves and you don’t seem to have money, but if you want a thing badly enough you go out and make it with your own hands.’

‘Well, why not?’ Dan returned, a little impatiently.

‘Why not?’ Judith echoed.

They had reached the top of the hill. She looked round the wide green horizon hedged on all sides by forests still uncut, some nearer, some farther away, but always shutting her in.

‘It’s all very well for you,’ she went on soberly. The excitement of the morning had left her; she felt she was estimating her situation justly again. ‘But what am I to do? I can’t get a single thing for myself, no matter how badly I want it. I don’t want a bridge or a railroad, but even a small thing I can’t have unless Grandfather or Mother or some of you here decide I ought to have it.

‘I can’t live in the kind of a house I am used to, or wear the clothes I like, or choose my work. And when I try to do the things you tell me to do, I do them so poorly!’

She had caught Dan’s attention. ‘The way thee puts it ——’

‘Isn’t that fair?’

‘Well ——’ Dan was frowning as he dismounted. ‘Thee got a bad start, Judith. If thee had lived here all thy life thee would have learned long ago this housework that comes so hard now. All us boys learned when we were little how to do the ordinary farm chores; and now we can get through them, hardly thinking about them at all. I suppose I’d not like it either, if I had to begin now to learn to milk a cow or swing an axe.’

He raised his arms and lifted Judith easily down.

‘Doesn’t thee like it here at all?’ His tone was a little hurt. ‘I know we aren’t grand. I expect we seem poor to thee. But think of living in a part of the country where even the poor man can do well for himself, without money or slaves or family influence!’

He looked round the same horizon that had seemed to Judith to hedge her off from all that was desirable. ‘This spring,’ he confided, ‘when the dogwood was in bloom all up and down the bluffs, I thought this must be the most beautiful place in the world. Wait till thee sees the dogwood!’

‘It would just remind me of Virginia,’ Judith said stubbornly.

For a moment the two turned defiant eyes on each other, each defending wordlessly his own beloved picture of white trees across the pale green of springtime hills. Then Judith laughed. Her manner was almost motherly, as if Dan were about David’s age.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ she said. ‘I shouldn’t talk so much. And I am honestly trying to be as much like you Huffs as I can, though I do seem to be a poor copy.’

‘And thank you, Dan, for taking me to meeting!’

‘I don’t ask thee to be like the Huffs!’ Dan remonstrated hotly, but Judith ran away with no answer but that same smile.

He led the horse off, much puzzled. Uneasily he

felt at his collar and smoothed his hair, but the necktie was properly arranged and his hair seemed to be no wilder than usual. Besides, he felt for some reason that Judith was laughing at herself, and why should she do that? There was a good deal of sense in what she had said; he meant to think it over.

CHAPTER XI

A LETTER FROM VIRGINIA

THE hot days of late summer continued their monotonous march. Judith worked faithfully, early and late, though without much sense of achievement. When she burnt a whole baking-skilletful of biscuits intended for breakfast and the family had to be content with cold corn pone, it was hard to remember that she had cooked all the supper of the night before, including that same corn pone, without any help. Her weaving was close and even, but the heel of the last sock she had tried to knit was such a curiously puckered affair that David had raveled it out and started it for her again.

And no matter how much she learned there were yet other accomplishments that must be mastered if one were to live in this young country. Not only must she learn to spin flax and wool, but the wool must be taken as it came from the sheep's back, washed, carded, and dyed with indigo, butternut hulls, or whatever colors the plants around them could be made to yield, before it was ready to go on the spinning-wheel. Within reach were mills that made cloth, but Mary Huff, like most of the women of the neighborhood, considered factory

cloth wickedly expensive, and continued to keep her own loom busy.

And she must get the trick of dipping candles, of drying fruit, of boiling hominy in lye made of wood-ashes until the hulls slipped off the white grains of corn; of a hundred other needful things about which she was still ignorant.

She was sitting on the doorstep of the weaving-cabin one evening, putting the last stitches in the fine shirt of Mark's request, and glad to be occupied with something she could do well, when Dan came home from his work. From strengthening the weakened floodgates of Grandfather Halloway's mill-race, he and Joseph John had gone on to mending the dam across the river, which also showed signs of strain from the flood; and the hauling and placing of the great boulders had stretched out over some little time.

'Thy mother sent word to-day that she would expect to drive over to-morrow,' he told Judith.

Judith exclaimed joyfully. 'I had almost decided she was not coming this summer at all. Did she seem well?'

'I didn't see her. She sent word by Joseph Halloway.'

'Don't you want to sit down?' Judith asked with unusual cordiality. 'David is off with the twins gathering lightning bugs; he doesn't keep me company so much nowadays.'

Dan silently lowered his long body to a cushiony patch of blue-grass opposite the doorway. Swallows and night hawks, out to glean an evening meal from the twilight skies, circled above them. Dan studied these for a while, and then his gaze turned to the trumpet vine Duberry had planted by the cabin door, which now reached a long curving arm across the lintel; and from the vine his eyes fell to Judith.

The girl was saying contentedly, 'I can show Mother my butter. I churned about five pounds to-day and we haven't cut into it yet. And the cabin is clean. I scrubbed the floor to-day with sand, and I greased the dog-irons, though I hate doing it! And I washed my work dress after supper. I can iron it and have it clean to wear.'

Dan saw that she was wearing her dress of embroidered muslin. Against its fresh whiteness her hands were red and scarred, but it set off, as the everyday linen never could, the clear pale coloring of her face and the dark eyebrows under the golden-tawny hair.

He regarded her for a long moment before he slowly rose to his feet. 'Wait a minute,' he said, and presently he was back around the corner of the cabin with a short length of a clean broad board, hand smoothed.

'There!' he said, placing the board across Judith's muslin lap, to her considerable astonish-



' I WANT THEE TO DRAW A PLAN OF THE KIND OF A HOUSE
THEE LIKES'

ment. 'And here's my carpenter's pencil. Make me a picture of thy grandmother's house again.'

'Grandmother Lankester's house?'

'That's what I mean.'

Judith continued to stare at him.

'I've been thinking,' said Dan, somewhat embarrassed at having to explain himself, 'about what thee has said, one time and another. I've decided that maybe thee's right about this house not being good enough. It is warm and sound, and I never thought about the looks of it until thee mentioned it; but now I think that after we get the railroad built we could have a new house. I want thee to draw a plan of the kind of house thee likes, so I can be studying it, and saving timber for the woodwork as we clear land.'

'Oh!' said Judith.

Carefully as she could, under Dan's minute questioning, she set down on the board a sketch of the Lankester house. She drew it from the front and then from the side. She drew floor plans, and even the design of the formal garden, though Dan, watching closely, could see no use in a formal garden and told her so. She made little sketches of shutters and fireplaces and banisters, until the drawing board was almost full and it was so dark that Dan took the board away from her.

'I'll put it up in the shop,' he said, 'where I can look at it when I'm at the work-bench, and figure

out the dimensions. Mother would like this. So would Joseph John and Mark. I don't know whether Father would think it was worth the trouble, but he would be willing to let me do it, and to help.

'Would this please thee, Judith?' he questioned suddenly. 'Would it make thee feel as if thee belonged here?'

'Would you *really* make a house like this?' Judith asked in her turn, and wished she had not.

Dan stood up and shook his head back angrily.

'Of course we would, if we made up our minds to do it! Hasn't thee seen enough of us yet to know that?'

'But none of you want a new house!' Judith persisted unhappily.

'Thee does,' Dan answered with dignity. 'I mean for thee to have some of the things thee wants most if thee stays with us and will wait till I can get them.'

'I knew there were folks like thee,' he went on with an effort. 'I saw them down in Cincinnati; but I thought they weren't important. I thought their houses and their clothes were a foolish waste. I looked down on them.'

'Then thee came; and I can see now that pretty dresses and good houses belong with thee. I want thee to have what thee chooses, because thy choice is better than ours in some ways. If thee will just wait ——' he repeated and halted.

‘I must go see that the wagon is ready for to-morrow morning,’ he said finally to Judith’s silence, and went off with the board under his elbow.

‘I ought to find David and put him to bed,’ Judith said to herself, but instead she continued to sit on the doorstep, resting her chin on her palms and thinking confused thoughts.

Up the path to her right the gray figure of Sir Thomas slowly detached itself from the shadows. Sir Thomas had been prowling more and sleeping less of late. Judith called to him, and at the sound of her voice he left the path and circled away from her, his head held unnaturally high. Her curiosity aroused, Judith went over toward him. The cat dodged farther into the darkness, but he seemed too encumbered to run, and presently he stood his ground and growled as his mistress came nearer.

‘What is it? You’ve caught something! Sir Thomas Cat, that’s a baby rabbit!’

Sir Thomas growled more fiercely, but Judith caught him by the loose skin of the back of his neck and he was forced to swing in a kitten-like coil while Judith rescued the frightened little handful of fur he had fetched in, and called for David.

While David was making this new contribution to the zoölogical gardens behind the woodshed, Judith recalled the little story of the Philadelphia cat that Grandfather Halloway had told her on their ride together.

Grandfather had asked, 'Does thee think thy Thomas cat could do so well?' And Judith had scornfully intimated that in the circles where she and Sir Thomas moved it had not been necessary for cats to provide dinners.

Now she knew better what Grandfather had in mind; and she would have been glad for him to know not only that Sir Thomas had been enterprising enough to catch a rabbit, but also that Judith could have cooked the rabbit for dinner.

'We didn't know much three months ago, Sir Thomas and I,' she thought. 'Just enough to eat what somebody else found and cooked and gave to us.'

Her mind returned to Dan's newest plan with a curious mixture of pleasure and indignation.

'Would I like a house like Grandmother's? Of course I should. But what does Dan think the Huff family would do with it? I suppose I should sit in it and admire it by myself, while the men went off together to build a new mill and Aunt Mary worked in the garden! Does he think that would be pleasant for me?

'And I can work, whether he thinks so or not. Uncle Henry said my pound cake yesterday was the best he had ever eaten! I'd like to make another for Polly to-morrow.'

She was awake and down her ladder very early in the morning. Family visits were generously

long. Her mother might be expected to come early and stay late, and to bring all four of the little girls as well as their grandfather and grandmother. Judith was actually shocked when the Halloway carriage drove into the yard in the middle of the morning with only Charity Lankester and Grandfather Halloway on its wide front seat. Not even Polly had come along.

Judith's linen dress had been ironed smooth and shining; she had been allowed to make a fresh pound cake and it had risen into a beautiful crusty loaf; and the butter waiting in the spring-house for display had never been more firm or showed a neater design across the top. The twins and David had worked hard, cleaning the cobbled-up cages of their pets for Polly to see, and re-collecting those animals that escaped in the process; Mark had, without being asked, scrubbed the floor of the set-in porch before he went to the field; and Mary Huff had in preparation a dinner beginning with fried chicken, continuing through all the vegetables of her garden, and ending in a burst of pies of astonishing variety, 'so that every one can have something he likes,' she explained modestly.

It had been a frantically busy, happy morning; but now of a sudden, seeing that half-filled carriage and the two serious faces, Mary Huff and Judith lost all feeling of a gala occasion, and the twins and David hunted a more cheerful scene.

The guests were ushered into the living-room, where Charity Lankester laid her bonnet on the mountainous heights of the best bed and sat down with her knitting, with Grandfather Halloway beside her, balancing his old broad-brimmed beaver hat on his knee. He might get out to look over the farm by and by, he said. The first kindly inquiries as to health were passed as if there were nothing more important in the air. Judith was impatient to get these over, and yet she was afraid of what might follow.

‘We’ve had too much trouble already,’ she told herself. ‘Nothing more can happen.’ And she tried to bring herself to invite her mother out to see her weaving, but had not the courage.

Mary Huff was also waiting. With reckless disregard of her starched white apron she had set a pan of potatoes in her lap, and when at last Judith’s mother began to speak she continued to scrape off the papery skins until there were twice too many for their shrunken company.

‘I wish I could have come to see Judith and all of you before I was obliged to bring bad news,’ said Charity Lankester. ‘It has looked as if I hadn’t much interest in her; but I had to work every minute that I could if I was to make a living for the children. And I knew she was in good hands; Father said that, often. We all worked hard, but I felt we were in the right way.’

‘Then, day before yesterday came a letter from thy Grandmother Lankester, Judith.’

Judith saw now that though her mother’s face was calm her eyes were reddened as if she might have been weeping.

‘What did Grandmother say?’ Judith asked in some apprehension. By her mother’s look Grandmother Lankester must have found occasion for one of her memorable storms.

‘She said a good many things, on both sides of the paper and crossways of that,’ said Grandfather Halloway. ‘Lydia Lankester is a writer, she is.’

His daughter’s hands never faltered in their swift knitting.

‘She said, in the first place, that she had made complaint to the overseers of the poor about two old slaves that I freed, but left in Virginia because they felt that was their home and they preferred to live there. She said it was reported that they had been begging, and she felt certain they would become a public charge; and she expected to see that they were taken up and sold, according to law. She said she thought it was her duty to tell me this, so that I could see how mistaken I had been in freeing them.’

‘Thee believes this story, Charity?’ asked Mary Huff. ‘And what can thee do about it if it is true?’

‘Yes, I believe it. I was afraid it might happen when I left those two old people behind me, but I

took the risk and made myself responsible for their good behavior. She wrote to me about it before, thee remembers, Judith, but I was still hoping then for better news.

‘Now I have got to go back down to Virginia and see about them. I can do it before the cold weather sets in. That is one blessing. I have a little money I had expected to save for emergencies that I can use. Charity may have to go without her wedding-outfit. She will ride down with me and be married there, and her young man will come back with us. Charity likes that better than waiting a few months longer; so that one person is pleased.’

‘But, dear friend ——’ Mary Huff protested.

For a moment the other lost her carefully guarded self-control. ‘Does thee think that I covet that hard journey, or that I want to leave my girls, Mary Huff? I am going because I must. I am responsible for those poor shiftless black people that have never been educated to look out for their own best interests. They are old; they can’t work hard. Some farmer will buy them for a small sum and starve them and work them beyond their strength to get his money back. I must go and make some arrangement for them and do it at once!’

‘But what if thee has to do this for all thy slaves?’

‘She won’t have to,’ Grandfather Holloway interposed protectingly. ‘I’ve made inquiry about

'em for Charity, where she hain't had direct word herself, and they are doin' well. There is no call to worry about them. Besides,' he added, lifting his white-stubbed chin, 'if they was to make trouble which I don't expect of 'em, I'd still agree with Charity that it was her duty to see to 'em.'

Mary Huff was silenced and Charity Lankester went on.

'That's the first thing. And I can't say I hadn't feared it; but what she wrote next was a surprise to me.

'She said that she had recently had a visit from a young man of this neighborhood, and he had told her that a runaway slave of hers had escaped to Indiana at the same time we came, and was known to be living on the farm where Judith was staying.'

The eyes of her three elders turned to the girl.

'Is that true, Judith?'

Judith nodded, trying to think what this might mean.

'And thee didn't tell us?' Mary Huff reproached her.

She shook her head. 'Dan knew,' she said in a small voice. 'And Denny. I didn't mean to tell Denny but it slipped out.' Then, 'Oh!' exclaimed Judith. 'Oh! It was Denny that told Grandmother! It *must* have been Denny!'

'Denny?' her mother questioned.

'Doesn't thee know? He lived here,' said Judith.

The words tumbled out. 'We thought he was drowned in the flood. And he took —— No one could ever find ——' she stopped, hot and distressed. 'I'm sorry,' she apologized to Mary Huff. 'But maybe the box can be found now.'

Mary Huff said calmly, 'We hadn't let it be generally known that we missed Father's strong-box the same time that Denny left. We have no proof that he took it. But now it does look, as thee says, Judith, that we might at least be able to make inquiry about it, if this is Denny turned up in Virginia. Did she mention the young man again?'

It appeared she had not; Grandfather Halloway cut in sharply on their speculations. 'Considerable loss?' he asked. Judith knew what loss he might suspect.

'Thee'll have to ask Father for the details,' Mary Huff answered him. 'Now what was Lydia Lankester saying about this slave?'

The other sighed. 'She said that while she knew I was a dreamer and a fool — yes, that was what she wrote — she also knew me to be honest; and she did not expect that I would let her suffer the loss of a valuable gardener. She said that she would expect me to place this man Duberry under the care of the county sheriff, until she should send directions for his safe return.'

'What's thee say to that, Mary Huff?' Grandfather Halloway challenged.

‘Thee knows what I say, Joseph Halloway,’ she replied warmly. ‘We won’t let this poor soul be taken back into slavery. But, Charity, thee didn’t bring him up here!’

‘He said he followed our wagon,’ Judith volunteered. ‘He pretended he belonged with us. But it was accident that we came to the same farm, he and I.’

‘Thee seems to have known a good deal more than thee let on,’ observed her grandfather. ‘What does thee say to do with him now?’

‘I was thinking,’ said Judith, ‘that if I had any money of my own I would pay Grandmother Lankester for him and let him stay here in peace. It was my fault Denny found out where he came from.’

The others exchanged glances. But Grandfather Halloway only said, ‘I’m afraid he’ll have to be sent up to Canada.’

‘Is there haste?’ asked Mary Huff, setting down her pan of potato scrapings. ‘Should I call the men from the field?’

‘No.’ Grandfather Halloway was positive. ‘I know the sheriff. He ain’t in much sympathy with chasin’ down runaways. He won’t hurry. Not that I’d let this Blackberry waste too much time in pickin’ up his feet.’

‘Dear, dear,’ sighed Mary Huff. ‘It’s sad that one letter could hold so much trouble. I must put these potatoes on now. Dinner will be late.’

‘There was one thing more,’ said Charity Lankester.

‘Another?’

‘Yes, another.’

‘Judith’s grandmother writes that from what she is told — I suppose she means from what the young man has said — she feels that Judith is living in very low surroundings and is unhappy.

‘I will let thee see the letter, Judith, but I did not want to read it aloud and I didn’t bring it. It is a harsh letter.

‘She proposes for Judith to come back to Virginia and live with her for the rest of her days. She promises to give her every luxury, and I have no doubt she will. And she sends a draft for five hundred dollars, for Judith to purchase whatever she may need most.’

Judith sat dazed.

‘I will let thee think it over,’ said her mother gravely. ‘I want thee to make up thy own mind this time. I feel that I compelled thee to come up here against thy own will. I shall say only this: I expect to leave late next week for Virginia, and if thee decides to go, I think thee should travel with Charity and me.’

Judith’s startled eyes searched their faces for advice, but found none. Neither her mother nor her grandfather seemed to have anything more to say.

She followed Mary Huff into the kitchen and set about putting the pots on the fire. The older woman worked absent-mindedly.

‘I don’t know what we’ll do without thee, Judith,’ she said.

CHAPTER XII

JUDITH'S DECISION

THE usual noisy, before-dinner splashing of the Huff men on the washing-bench by the spring was subdued this noon. The news that Charity Lankester had brought was passed around in lowered voices; by the time that the family had settled at the dinner-table every one knew that Charity Lankester and young Charity were traveling back to Virginia; that Denny had been heard of; that Duberry was an escaped slave and, most remarkable of all, that Judith had been asked to go back to her Virginian grandmother.

David wept openly, without shame. He washed his face, but it was soon streaked again with muddy tear channels. He was sure Judith would go; she had always been different from the rest of them, and it was only reasonable to suppose she would return to the place where there were other people like herself. The twins were busy calculating what Judith could possibly do with all that money, though they were not quite certain whether Grandmother Lankester had sent five hundred or five thousand dollars; but David had no interest in their argument; he rubbed his eyes and wept afresh.

‘Where,’ asked Mary Huff, when every one but herself had been helped to fried chicken, ‘where is Duberry?’

The old man was not at the table, though he had washed with the others at the spring.

‘Go call him in, Daniel,’ his mother bade. ‘He may be backward about eating with company. I’m sorry we overlooked him.’

‘Can’t find him,’ Dan reported after search.

Mary Huff looked worried. ‘What can have happened?’

‘If I’d have been him,’ said Robert Barclay, ‘I’d have run and hid from the sheriff as soon as I heard he was after me.’

‘But that wouldn’t be sensible.’

‘No,’ said her husband, ‘but I think Rob may be right. We’ll finish our dinner and then look around for him. He won’t go far in broad daylight.’

The meal passed hurriedly. Two custard pies were entirely overlooked, though Mary Huff did not forget to pass Judith’s perfect pound cake.

‘Thee made this?’ her mother asked with astonished pleasure.

‘She made it and baked it all by herself,’ Mary Huff answered proudly. ‘And that’s saying a good deal, for when she first came she burnt herself if she came anywhere near the fire. Judith, take thy mother and show her thy weaving. I warrant she did no better at thy age.’

Judith led her mother shyly to the weaving-cabin to display the web of cloth on the loom, and then, encouraged by her praise, to the spring-house to see the butter.

‘What does thee think ——’ Charity Lankester began, but checked herself. ‘No, I shan’t ask what thee expects to do until thee has time to think it over longer. But I will say this, daughter: thee has done very well this summer, much better than I hoped.’

‘I can’t make soap,’ Judith confessed. ‘I can’t wash the wristbands of shirts clean. I hate to grease dog-irons and I always shall! And I don’t know whether I shall ever learn to turn the heel of a sock or toe-off.’

Her mother appeared to understand these serious failings. ‘I never liked to handle grease myself. But then I never felt it was right to ask a slave to do work that I wouldn’t do. If thee doesn’t feel so ——

‘I want thee to do what is right for thee, Judith. The right thing for thee may not be the same as the right thing for me.

‘I see that Father is talking to Daniel. When he is finished will thee tell him that I am ready to go home? I’ll visit with Mary Huff now.’

The conversation between the old man and the young one was very serious. Judith, waiting her opportunity, saw her grandfather stalk away into

the house, before she could speak to him. Dan, in his turn, strode past Judith with his head bent, as if she had not been there.

Judith said, 'Dan!'

He turned a troubled face to the girl.

'I want some advice. Nobody will help me to decide. They say they want to leave me free, and I never have been free before. First it was Grandmother Lankester who told me what to do and then it was Mother. Ought I to stay here, or shall I go back to Virginia?'

'Better go,' Dan advised somberly.

'Why?'

'Every reason. What is there here for thee?'

'What about the new house?' Her tone was faintly teasing.

Dan passed the back of his hand across his frowning forehead.

'I was a fool,' he said roughly. 'I flattered myself Joseph Halloway was certain to help us with our railroad. He was well satisfied with our work on the dam and the floodgates. I thought he was about ready to tell us he would invest some money in railroad stock.'

'Then to-day I had to tell him about losing the land options that were in Father's box. I should have told him sooner, but thee knows I kept hoping they would turn up. And of course he's too good a business man to invest with us now.'

‘But we may find Denny and the box still.’

‘I suggested that, but he has no faith in it; I haven’t much myself.’

‘So you’ll have to give up the railroad?’

‘No!’ the young man exclaimed violently. ‘No! A railroad ought to be built. It’s needed. But it will take longer.’ He set his jaw hard and looked away over her head.

‘And the house will have to wait on the railroad?’

‘Yes. We can’t give thee anything thee wants. We can only take thy time and strength. Go, while thee has the chance.’

Judith had finally caught his eyes, and he found himself somewhat disconcerted under her searching gaze.

‘Well — doesn’t thee think so?’ he asked.

‘I want to know this,’ the girl said. ‘Do you think I’m useful enough to stay? No one has to keep me for kindness’ sake any more.’

‘Useful enough?’ Dan found this an odd question.

‘Yes, useful. You all hate slavery; you wouldn’t go back and live in a slave state, and yet you all seem fairly sure of my going. Am I such a failure that you don’t care what I do?’

‘Thee is the contrariest girl I ever saw,’ Dan answered, roused from his depression. ‘How long ago was it that thee was telling me thee had to do

work thee didn't like and live in a house where thee didn't feel at home, and wear clothes thee didn't choose?

'And now thee can go back to Virginia and have all the things thee wants, which thee knows we can't give thee here. And then — and then thee asks me if thee shall go, and if thee is a failure here!' His red crest fairly lifted with indignation.

'And I do want to know! Tell me!' Judith returned with energy. 'Am I worth keeping in this new country where every one earns his own living? Grandmother can afford to maintain me when I'm no use at all, but you can't! If I sew and weave and bake a pound cake sometimes, does that make up for the times I let the soap boil over and the bread burn?'

Dan shook his head. 'That isn't the point.'

Judith turned away defeated.

'I thought you would tell me,' she said. 'You generally tell me the truth whether it is pleasant or not.'

Dan straightened abruptly, swallowed hard, and stepped over squarely in front of the girl, looking down at her bright head. He put his hands behind him and clasped one wrist tightly with the strong fingers of the other hand.

'Then I *will* tell thee. I don't know whether thee is useful or not when thy work is counted up in dollars and cents. I never have tried to figure it

out and I'm not going to begin. Since thee wants to know, I will say that I think that thee would be more useful as thee went on, because thee has a good head, and because thee will work even at the things I can see thee hates to do.

'But as far as I'm concerned thy usefulness doesn't matter much. What I care about is that thee is a lady; that thee has pretty manners and gentle ways with David; that thee knows about beautiful things. We never had time for anything so — so pleasing before thee came.'

He swallowed again and went on, still gazing down intently at her.

'I had no idea a girl could remember so many details of construction about a house as thee drew for me last night. We could build the finest house in the countryside, thee and I,' he said wistfully.

'And since thee's going, I'll tell thee this: I like to have thee around just to look at. Thy hair ——' he stopped abruptly, held by Judith's reproachful brown eyes.

'Don't you even like my pound cake?' she asked.

The young man regarded her in silence for a moment. 'I ate two slices,' he said, 'if that is what thee really wants to know.' And on that he turned and left her.

'They haven't found Duberry yet,' Mary Huff told Judith at the house.

‘Father thinks we ought to stay a little longer now that we’re here,’ her mother added. ‘Perhaps I should see this man if he can be found, and the Huffs think he is hiding near.’

Mary Huff suggested, ‘Why not take David, Judith, and the two of you walk down along the river? David is bound he’ll help with the hunting, but Father wouldn’t take him back to the pasture woods for fear he would get too tired. He had some thought that he might find Duberry back by the sugar-camp, and the twins went with him. Mark and Joseph John have gone down the road in different directions.’

‘Haven’t they looked along the river yet?’

‘Yes,’ Mary Huff smiled tolerantly. ‘But David wasn’t with them. He thinks he can find places the others have missed. And he will be glad to have thy company. I think myself Duberry may come in of his own accord after dark to get food.’

‘Run along, Judith,’ her mother answered to her glance of inquiry. ‘Thee and I can visit on our way South.’

There was no doubt that they were all expecting her to go back to Grandmother Lankester’s. Mother hadn’t meant to say that, but it was what she really thought would happen. David held her hand very tightly as they walked across Dan’s ruined cornfield, and there were tear smudges dried on his cheeks. David thought she would go, too.

Judith found herself accepting the general decision. These conscientious folk were nearly always right. But they ought not to talk of her happiness. Didn't they realize that they were just now teaching her to recognize a new kind of happiness, the satisfaction of accomplishing something difficult and of being taken in on an equal footing with other workers? That was a different pleasure, and a better one, Judith thought, than the enjoyment of beautiful things fashioned by some one else, no matter how well they were made. It was a kind of happiness that she could not resign without a feeling of loss.

She and David had almost reached the river bank. David was personally directing this search and it was his idea to investigate the sycamore where Denny had often tied his boat. They clambered with difficulty over a pile of dried driftwood barricading the bank at this point.

'They don't even tie the boat up here now,' Judith objected, but mildly, because this search was chiefly to amuse David.

'The tree is hollow, doesn't thee remember?' David reproved her in hushed tones. 'Duberry might be hiding inside. Once I saw a squirrel there in the hollow!'

The flood had swept away the last remnants of the bank between the tree and the river. David saw that if he were to reach the opening of the

hollow he would be obliged to work his way out on the exposed roots directly over the water, which pleased him, as adding an extra spice of adventure to this expedition. He laid his cheek against the smooth green and white tree trunk and spread his arms wide around it.

‘If thee should fall ——’ Judith demurred, but David, having advanced one slippery step, got no farther.

‘It’s Denny,’ he announced wonderingly. ‘Denny in the little boat! How did thee get here, Denny?’

Judith leaned out over the crumbling bank and saw, rising from the boat that was hiding away almost under the great tree, a shabby, shamefaced figure that yet managed a certain jauntiness as it clung to the anchorage of a sycamore root.

Denny’s round face, turned on David with a sullen, purposeful expression, suddenly relaxed and glistened with delight as he caught sight of Judith. He smoothed his black hair with a determined open palm, and pulled down his dirty waistcoat, talking very fast.

‘I never thought I’d have such luck, Miss Judith. But, sure, luck has been with me all the way! ’Tis well you did not go with me that wild wet night I begged you to do so. By meself I went and ’twas much easier so. First I cleared the path for you, Miss Judith, and now I’m on the way to start a fortune for meself!’

He looked so little like a favorite of fortune that Judith was quite taken aback; but Denny went on still faster, with the same elation.

'You'll hear from your grandmother soon, Miss Judith, calling you back to your own beautiful home, and a shame it was ever to tear you away! 'Twas a fitting place for your own beauty, and no higher compliment can I pay it. And it was meself that persuaded the old lady that she should forgive and forget and rescue from this uncivilized territory.'

He threw a glance up the river at Dan's bridge. 'Think,' he said pityingly, 'of livin' in a country so poor-mannered that a gentleman on his way home from an evenin's entertainment can be caught off his guard by a young sprout and doused in the river, not once, but twice!

' 'Twas malice and jealousy,' he went on loftily. 'Malice and jealousy! I've had plenty of time to think it out and I'm convinced. And chiefly because you favored me with your company that night, Miss Judith!'

The girl said, very quietly, 'Tell me where you have been, Denny, and what you have been doing.'

Distrust darkened his face. He eyed David. 'I've been talkin' too much before the small boy,' he said. 'Davy, my lad, if you go tellin' tales on me, I'll come back and burn the little cabin down over your head some black night!'

David shrank back against Judith, who put an arm about him and stood unmoved.

'David will not tell anything without my permission. I know David. Go on, Denny!'

'Well, then,' Denny began, glad to boast again, 'I went away to Lynchburg, as I said ——'

'How did you get there?'

Denny hesitated, but Judith's interest was too flattering, and besides, he had grown rather proud of his daring.

'First I thought I would take the little bateau, but the night was so dark I left it behind, thinking I could not steer, and when the flood came on I knew I had been wise.

'I went by the Lacys' — have you seen young Haydock since that night, Miss Judith?'

Judith shook her head.

'No? I thought he might have been sparkin' round, or — or maybe complainin'. Well, I needed his horse worse than he did, and there it was, still tied to the Lacys' hitch-rack, while he drank cider with one or two in the cabin, late as it was. And had he not played a mean trick on me, takin' my girl away from me?

'I took his horse that night, and a good horse it was, too. It could swim a creek in flood and get along with no more fodder than it could pick up from the roadside. I sold it somewhere down the Kanawha River, after it went lame, and still I got

enough money from the nag to pay a man for givin' me a lift over the mountains, into Lynchburg town.'

'Had you no money before that?' Judith asked, with all the sympathy she could muster.

'A few coppers,' Denny answered bitterly. 'Often I begged my food. These Huff folks, Miss Judith, seldom paid me money for me hard work. A calf, maybe, now and then; or ground for a field if I would cut down the trees on it meself; but very seldom the hard cash I earned.'

'But I have come to better times, thanks to your Grandmother Lankester. At first, I admit, I made little headway. The old lady nearly took off me head for mentionin' your name, Miss Judith! And she said I looked like a tramp, as well I might, sleepin' in me best clothes with only the trees for shelter, lackin' money to buy lodgin's. But I hung on, and before we were through she was near weepin' on me shoulder for grief at your sufferin's, and at the end she had two niggers take me off and make me clean and comfortable.'

'And the best of it for me was this.' He lowered his voice. 'She says to me, she says, "The times are bad," she says. "My daughter-in-law, who always was a fool [Beggin' your pardon, Miss Judith], my daughter-in-law has freed her slaves, not only to her own hurt and that of her children, but her action has affected my own slaves, too. I find them

discontented; and my old gardener actually ran away the very day after my granddaughter left me."

'You know I have a speakin' countenance, Miss Judith. She could see I knew somethin' of importance and she pressed me for it; and I felt it my duty to tell her about Duberry, the old black rascal! Then she was both pleased and angry.

'I said, "Write for him, and have both your granddaughter and your gardener back." But she told me that it seldom does any good to write to the officers of a free state for an escaped slave. They turn their eyes another way while some one warns him. A slave-owner that wants his property back must go after it or send some trusted person.

'Then I saw my chance. I said, "Send me, ma'am; I know where to find him." And she agreed, Miss Judith, seein' she could trust me. And what do you think the reward is to be? Half his market value! Two hundred dollars! And my travelin' expenses, which I have already collected. I wish he was worth twice as much instead of bein' old and near worn out!'

He paused for breath and for expected applause, a ridiculous figure balanced in the uncertain boat, but triumphant even as he clung hard to the twisted root for support.

'We don't know where Duberry is,' David spoke up. 'We're looking for him now!'

Denny smiled broadly. 'Ah, but I know! Though why the old simpleton should have taken that spot for his afternoon's repose I cannot tell! I came through the woods just now on the other side of the river and stopped to look in a hollow tree I know over there. It used to be a fine hiding-place for fishing-tackle and the like.'

'Do you have some there still?' Judith asked politely.

'No, none,' Denny denied hastily. 'I have nothing there now, not inside the tree nor out. 'Twas just for old sake's sake I went by, since I had enjoyed a few quiet hours there one time and another. You know how it is, Miss Judith.'

'Do I?'

'Of what are you suspectin' me?' Denny demanded suddenly. 'What did you think I might have there?'

'You said fishing-tackle,' Judith reminded him.

Denny shrugged uneasily and laughed, performing a little involuntary dance thereafter to keep his position in the rocking boat.

'I found somethin' after all. There was old Duberry tucked back in the tree. I had not been expectin' him, and for the moment, I admit, I was scared half loose from me skin.

'Then says I, recoverin' me presence of mind very quick, "Come out of here! Quit shirkin' the afternoon's labor!" thinkin' when I had him out-

side I could slip handcuffs on him and have him secure before he suspected.

'Would you believe it?' Denny queried in an injured tone. 'The old nigger would not come out of his hidey-hole for me! Like a 'coon he stuck to it, and when I would have pulled him out he fought! I says to him, "I will tell Mister Huff the way you are shirkin'," but he would not come even for that! What is the matter with him I don't know. It shows how spoiled a slave turns after only a taste of freedom; so that he has no proper respect for the name of his master.

'At first I thought I might go and speak to Mister Huff, who is mostly a man for upholdin' the law. But that was hasty. I saw the little boat and I thought how much better it would be to float down in it to Pittsville and find the sheriff to help me. Me horse is stabled at Kingston, which is a shorter distance, but not in the same county, so it would do me no good.

'For, after all, I am not certain that Mister Huff is sound on the legal rights of a slave-owner. The Huffs might sneak Duberry away to Canada under my nose, lookin' blank-faced and pleasant all the time. I have suspicions that they hid runaway slaves in the thicket back of the sugar-camp last summer; though I never told you that, Miss Judith, because I did not want to prejudice you against the family whilst you had to live there,' he

finished virtuously, his words fairly tumbling over each other, so delighted was he to have a confidante.

In spite of her relief in gaining so much information so easily, Judith found it hard to mask a deep and growing distaste. It seemed best to get this over quickly. She said, 'Denny, please row me across the river. I want to see Duberry.'

'Would ye help me with him?' Denny cried. 'He might come out for you when he would fear me. But I will not take Davy,' he added with great firmness.

'I don't think David ought to go,' Judith agreed. 'David, run along and wait by the bridge for me. Gather some peppermint for tea.'

David had long since passed the point where he felt that he understood what was going on over his head. It sounded as if Denny and Judith were planning to send poor Duberry back to slavery, but he knew that was too cruel to be true, like Denny's threat of burning down the cabin. It must be only teasing. He looked up at Judith with a quivering lip.

'Trust Judith,' the girl said gently. And with that he had to content himself. He went slowly away, along the tangled river bank, glancing back to see Denny maneuvering the boat to a better loading-place and then rowing briskly for the other shore.

'This will be much smoother,' Denny said hap-

pily, tying the boat at a low willow bush that hid them from David's sight. 'If I had to raise a row to get Duberry now it would be harder for me to slip back into this part of the country to pick up another runaway.'

'You mean to go on with this — profession?' Judith inquired.

'Indeed and I do. 'Tis profitable. Why do you look at me like that, my sweet girl?' He had tenderly assisted Judith from the boat, and now that she stood on dry sand he still held her hand in his own grubby one.

'Don't you like the idea, maybe? Then I tell you,' he promised gallantly, clasping his other hand over hers. 'When I have a little money scraped together I will come down to Virginia to stay. I will buy land and set up as a gentleman, like me ancestors in Ireland. And we will not have to wait long for your grandmother's estate; the old lady looked to me to be far from well. She might go off in a temper fit any day!'

Judith removed her hand from his; the faint color in her cheeks had grown deeper as the curves of her lips tightened. In silence she went over to the edge of the water, knelt and washed her hands; and when she had washed them three times, she scooped up sand and scoured the hand that Denny had held until it was rosy, back, palm, and wrist.

‘And what do ye mean by that?’ Denny asked roughly.

Judith rose to her feet, shaking the drops of water from her fingers. In her brown eyes glinted the unmistakable light of anger.

‘You may go now,’ she said coldly.

‘And why? Were you not comin’ with me to get Duberry?’

‘You will not get Duberry,’ Judith took pleasure in informing him. ‘I have decided to buy him from Grandmother.’

‘You?’

‘Do you think I cannot?’

‘I don’t know what to think, except that maybe you are too good for my touch. You, a waif, no better than myself, here on the Huffs’ charity! Girl, have you no gratitude to me, that I made a clear way for you to return to Virginia?’

‘I don’t *wish* to go back to Grandmother Lankester’s,’ Judith stated distinctly. ‘See what a poor thing you are yourself, Denny, directly you have a chance at her money! You are ready to take advantage of your good friends, and to haul back to slavery a frightened, harmless old man who has only a few years to live anywhere! Why, Denny, Duberry saved David’s life!’

‘Is that the way you talk?’ Denny snarled. He worked at the knot in the boat rope with trembling fingers. ‘Then I’ll be gettin’ on to find the sheriff.

We'll see if you can deceive a trustin' man and cheat him out of the reward of his labors!'

He pushed the boat free, waded out, and climbed into it, careless of water in his old boots.

'Don't forget to tell the sheriff about the Haydock horse, too,' Judith lifted her voice to say.

Denny's oars, poised for a mighty pull, hovered in the air while he took this vital thrust. The boat wavered and drifted downstream, and Denny began to row half-heartedly, but his departure was regrettably less pathetic by reason of the face he could not resist making at the disdainful girl on the receding shore.

'I was foolish,' Judith told herself, as she looked about for a path up the bluff. 'I meant to find out if he knew about the box, and where it was hidden, if he had it. And then I got angry!'

Her anger was already fading. It was impossible to be in a temper long with Denny; he was too ridiculous.

'I'll find Duberry and persuade him to come home with me. Denny won't dare bring the sheriff. And I'll buy Duberry before Grandmother can send any one else.'

The great trees of the forest hedged the top of the bluff; where the sun struck in they had raised a green wall of branches webbed with grapevine and undergrown with brush, while farther back the shade had kept the forest floor fairly clear; but

Judith preferred to work her way as near to the edge of the bluff as she could, so that she could sometimes catch sight through the leafy loopholes of the familiar cleared fields across the river.

The fear of the woods that had clung to her ever since the night of the storm was still alive, and now it grew as the excitement of her encounter with Denny died away. It was not Robert Barclay's treasured tale of the panther of twenty years before, following his father through the woods screaming, that troubled her; nor even the more modern bogey-story of blacksnakes that dropped down from the branches above and wrapped themselves around one's neck. It was the fear that a rustling leaf might be warning that a strange hunter approached, or that a dead tree-trunk, dimly seen, might turn out to be some man waiting for her.

'If I were frightened again, I should run!' Judith admitted. A path turned back into the shadowy depths, and here, she guessed, she must strike back to find the hollow tree where Duberry was hiding. Instead she turned to look out again over the valley, whose far hills were softened by a blue haze that hinted of autumn; it looked safe and friendly and she was loath to leave it behind.

She took a long breath like a diver, and struck off determinedly along the path, startled by the nut that a scolding gray squirrel dropped on her head, terrified by the clutch of a cat-brier at her skirts,

but not allowing herself to be halted. It was a long time that she walked among the tall tree-trunks and still she did not come to the hollow tree.

‘If I leave the path to search I may be lost. I could go back and ask the boys to come —— But I won’t! This thing I will do by myself!’

At one side she heard a soft shuffling, and paused to listen. Might it be a bird scratching in the leaves? It did not sound like that. Nothing in her range of vision moved, but presently as she stood in that spot motionless, with cold hands and thudding heart, she made out the huge gray outline of a headless tree-trunk, and spurring herself with all the courage at her command, she moved toward it.

She had taken for granted that she would recognize the hollow tree as soon as she saw it; but now she realized that she had seen it only by lightning flashes, and that this tree ahead might be her refuge, or it might be a different tree. There was more than one hollow tree in the woods.

She approached carefully. ‘Duberry!’ she called softly. ‘Duberry!’

There was no answer, but as she came closer a bent figure scurried out of the tree, only to stumble and fall when he had gone a little way.

‘Don’t be afraid, Duberry,’ Judith said, with great relief. The terror of the woods left her that instant. ‘It’s me, Miss Judith. No one will hurt you.’

The old man lifted his disconsolate head, whose wool was powdered with the brown dust of decayed wood.

'Take me back to yo' Gran'ma, Miss Judith. 'Tain't no use fo' to hide. Two folks found me already.' He nursed his ankle, not attempting to rise. 'Fust come Mist' Denny, diggin' in d' leaves, an' nebbe' know I heah till I had to sneeze; an' den he wuz afte' me. Den come you, Miss Judith, an' when I run I had to fall ove' dis place Mist' Denny been diggin' an' twis' my ankle. Cain't git away.'

'I'm not going to take you to Grandmother, Duberry.'

'No use try to fool me, Miss Judith.'

'I'm going to take you back to the Huffs. Nobody will hurt you.'

'Dat's whut Mist' Denny say fust. I fout him off, but I won't fight no more.' He sniffed. 'I go back an' take my whuppin's.'

'Get up, Duberry,' Judith commanded imperiously. 'Here's a stick. Lean on that till your ankle feels better. It's not very bad, is it?'

She put both hands under his shoulder and lifted with all her young strength.

'You aren't heavy. I don't think Denny is much of a fighter, if you stood him off. Duberry! *What was he digging here?*'

'Sho ain't much of a fighte'. He say he wish he

ain't bruk he knife, diggin'. Whut he diggin'? I don' know; but I glad he bruk he knife.'

He stood teetering uncertainly, trying for a firm support with his stick. 'Whut you want, Miss Judith?'

Judith was bending over a little pile of loose earth and leaves beside the hole in the ground from which they had been dug. The hole was in the lee of a low boulder, hardly eight inches above ground at its highest, and overgrown with vines that reached out over the ground around the rock, except for the space of the excavation, from which they looked to have been twisted back earlier in the summer, for they were now matted together. Judith dropped to her knees and began to dig in the hole with her two hands.

'Whut you doin', Miss Judith? Want me to he'p?'

'No. I'm going to do this by myself,' Judith answered, breathing hard, as intent on burrowing as any little woods animal.

Presently she stopped to poke one inquiring finger down through the loose mould, and then she set to digging harder than ever. Something flat was coming to view. She forced her hand down one side of it and brought up, with some effort, a long-handled, rusty frying-pan, buried there upside down.

'Mist' Denny's fish-fry pan,' Duberry remarked

with hungry interest. 'Wuz dat whut he wanted? I didn' know he had fish wid him!'

Judith did not answer. She was lifting from the hole a small, heavy box for which the frying-pan had served as a water-shed. It was reddish-yellow with rust; the hasp which the padlock held was battered as if there had been an attempt to pry it open; but the lock was still intact and the box still sound.

CHAPTER XIII

JOURNEY'S END

SOME time later in the afternoon a little company straggled up to the set-in porch. Judith led the three, holding fast the iron box, from which rust and black forest soil had rubbed off liberally on her arms and dress. Old Duberry limped along behind; once in a while Judith remembered to let him catch up with her, but always impatience sent her hurrying on ahead. David ran back and forth like an inquisitive puppy, asking questions, of which Judith did not answer one.

She found her mother saying farewell to the Huffs on the porch. 'I think we'd better not wait, thank thee, Henry Huff. All of you have come back without finding the man, so I can't expect to see him to-day. Why, Judith! Judith, child!'

Judith had only one thought. 'Take it, Uncle Henry! See if it is all right. I do hope the papers aren't hurt!'

They looked in blank amazement at the eager girl holding up her homely treasure; it was with an effort that Henry Huff roused himself to take the heavy box from her.

He turned it over slowly in his big hands. 'Where did thee get this?'

'I found it. Please! Open it and see if all the papers are there!'

Henry Huff fumbled for his watch chain and detached from it a key. When he had it free he turned the box around once more. 'It has an H. H. on it,' he remarked doubtfully. 'Maybe it *is* mine.'

He rubbed the padlock with his palm, bent and blew the dirt from the keyhole, and fitted the key in place. Slowly and stubbornly it turned and the rusty padlock unclosed.

'It *is* my box,' said Henry Huff, with a great boyish smile. He forced the lid back on its stiff hinges. 'And the papers are here, and not water-damped to hurt, even if the box is rusty.' He stood fingering the precious documents, while the older boys crowded around to see for themselves.

Grandfather Halloway broke in. 'Well, Judith, I see thee fetched in something besides the box. Where was our colored friend hid out? The boys about gave him up. Hey, Mark?'

'Oh, I forgot Duberry,' Judith apologized. 'I found him the same place as the box. And, Mother, I have decided to buy Duberry with Grandmother Lankester's five hundred dollars.'

'I suppose thee dug up both of them,' commented Grandfather Halloway, in the pause that followed this announcement. 'What's this thee plans to do with him? Be a leetle plainer.'



JUDITH LED THE THREE HOLDING FAST THE IRON BOX

Judith drew a long breath. 'David and I saw Denny down by the river,' she began to explain as patiently as possible.

'*Denny?*' three or four voices exclaimed together.

'Yes, Denny. He had run across Duberry in the big hollow tree while he was over there trying to dig up this box he had hidden. Denny said he was going to get the sheriff to help him take Duberry back to Virginia; and I decided, that minute, to buy him instead. Then I went over and got Duberry and found the box.'

She looked around to see if they understood, but behind her Duberry spoke up quaveringly:

'Miss Judith, you say Mist' Denny wint afte' d' she'iff?'

'He said he was going to, but he won't!' Judith assured him, comfortingly. 'Denny stole a horse and I know it. He won't bring any sheriff around me! But I am going to buy you just the same, Duberry!'

'You sho is good to me, Miss Judith,' said the old man humbly. He eased himself down on the grass and wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

'Judith is tired,' Mary Huff said compassionately, across the sudden fire of questions provoked by this last news. 'Sit down, child. Why didn't thee come back and tell us, so the boys could have done this for thee?'

Judith lifted her head proudly; in spite of her

dusty disorder she stood before them a figure of dignity.

‘I had to do it all by myself to show that I could be of some use. I wanted to earn my right to stay with you. I want to stay!’

‘Dear heart,’ Mary Huff said gently, ‘thee earned that right long ago when thee made us all love thee. But thee has behaved like a brave girl to-day, and we shall welcome thee the more, if thee will stay with us.’

Most unexpectedly Grandfather Halloway blew his nose, a trumpet blast. ‘I tell thee this,’ he said severely, when his handkerchief was stowed away, ‘I tell thee this, Judith. If thee chooses to stay here I ain’t goin’ to have thee beholden to Lydia Lankester. Thee send back her draft. I won’t have thee keep it!’

‘But Duberry ——’ Judith faltered.

‘I’ll pay for him myself,’ declared Grandfather Halloway, with even greater severity. ‘I can afford five hundred as easy as Lydia Lankester! I judge thee means to set him free? Thee ain’t keepin’ him for a coachman or anything? I thought not.’

‘I’ll pay half of that, Joseph Halloway,’ said Henry Huff.

‘Thee don’t need to,’ Grandfather Halloway returned.

‘I wouldn’t feel right not to help free the man

that saved my boys. I'm not a rich man, as thee knows, and I shall have to find out my responsibility for this horse that Denny took, but I can get that much money together.'

Grandfather Halloway slowly nodded approval. 'I can see how thee feels.'

They had, Judith thought, taken affairs out of her hands as usual. She had only one small plan left to try for herself.

'Mother,' she said softly, while the two men talked on, 'Mother, if Aunt Mary doesn't mind, may I keep Polly here while thee goes down to Virginia?'

'We should enjoy the little girl,' Mary Huff said heartily, as the other hesitated. 'She could go hunting spicewood with David and give Judith a rest.'

David looked pleased, though his hand held Judith's even tighter, for fear she might yet change her mind.

'It would be a weight off my mind,' confessed Charity Lankester. 'No one takes such good care of little folks as Judith.'

'And, Mother,' Judith said earnestly, 'please give my love to Grandmother Lankester, and tell her I'll write to her if she wants to hear from me. Tell her I'm happy here, and that is why I choose to stay. And tell her she will be proud of me yet!'

'Thee knows thy grandmother as well as I do,'

said her mother. 'Thee won't expect her to be convinced at the first telling, nor yet at the second. But I will do my best. And if I were thee, I would write to her first, without waiting to hear from her. I suspect she is a very lonely old woman.

'Good-bye, Judith. Thee is my own dear girl!'

When the visitors had driven away, Judith went back to the weaving-cabin to make herself clean to help with supper. She allowed herself to linger before the hearth, admiring the shining black andirons, and to finger the roll of cloth on the loom, feeling for the first time that these belonged to her.

Coming out of the cabin door, her hair freshly braided and wearing the embroidered muslin, she found Dan waiting for her.

'I wanted thee to know,' he said directly, 'that Joseph Halloway told me the last thing before he left that he would help us with the railroad. He says he hasn't so much faith in railroads, but a good deal of faith in the Huffs; and thy staying here with us gives him still more confidence in the family! Thee won't be sorry, Judith!'

His gaze swept down the valley, and now his train, traveling sweetly along the flat iron bars, seemed more real than it had ever appeared before. He could see it stopping for wood and water, and collecting its daily load of goods and passengers, to the profit of all the country round.

Judith watched his intent young face, not altogether sharing his satisfaction, for she had never been able to feel the great importance of railroads, except as something that Dan wanted; and though she had changed a great deal, and might change still more, she hardly supposed she would ever share the Huffs' passion for engines. Still ——

'I know I shan't be sorry, Dan,' she answered, and pledged thereby a faith in something more important than an unbuilt railroad. 'And now I must set the table. Aunt Mary told me I might put on her wedding china to-night; she trusts me to wash it now.'

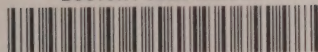
Dan stepped back from her path with quizzical, smiling eyes on Judith. When she had awakened his attention this summer it had usually been as a lovely but exasperating stranger. She might appear so again, but he was aware of her now as some one familiar and dear, though no less good to look upon; and he was well assured that this was the person he would oftenest see in Judith through the years ahead.

'I'll see to it that Rob and Tommy wash the dishes,' he said. 'I'm going to bring around another board for thee to make sketches of the corner-cupboards in our new house!'

THE END



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